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ABSTRACT

This book is a collection of 30 "Schools in the Middle" newsletters that were published from 1981-90. These articles, which focus on the melding of theory and practice, reflect exemplary middle-level practices, issues, and concerns about early adolescents during the past decade. Among the articles contained in Part 1, titled "Successful Middle Level Schools: What They Are and What They Could Be," are "Middle Level Schools as They Should and Could Be" (William M. Alexander); "A Consumer's Guide to Middle Level Education" (NASSP Council on Middle Level Education); "Four Climates of Effective Middle Level Schools" (J. Howard Johnston with J. Maria Ramos de Perez); "Middle Level School Grades and Program Development" (Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.); "Middle Level Schools--Once Around the Elephant" (John Lounsbury); "Middle Level Programs: More Than Academics" (Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark); and "Dance to the Music of Time: The Future of Middle Level Education" (James A. Beane). Part 2, which deals with middle-level programs and curriculum, includes among other articles: "Interdisciplinary Teaming: Organization, Rationale, and Implementation" (Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark); "Interdisciplinary Studies at the Shelburne Middle School" (John J. Winton); "Moving Into and Out of the Middle Level School" (Edward N. Brazee); "Helping Middle Level Early Adolescents from Broken Homes" (Robert Allers); "Heterogeneous Grouping in Middle Level Schools: Leadership Responsibilities for Principals" (Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.); "Planning Gifted/Talented Middle School Programs: Issues and Guidelines" (Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.); "The Ability/Achievement Dilemma of Gifted Middle Level Girls" (Linda R. Kramer); "Interscholastic Athletics and Middle Level Education: To Have or Not To Have?" (Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.); "What Values Are We Teaching, Should We Teach, at the Middle Level?" (John Lounsbury); and "Algebra Isn't the Answer: Alternatives to Enrich Eighth Grade Mathematics" (Fernand J. Prevost). Part 3, which examines issues in school restructuring and leadership, includes the following among the articles in this section: "Interview with William T. Gruhn" (George Melton); "Middle Level Educational Programs: Making the Ideal a Reality" (Donald C. Clark and Jerry W. Valentine); "Reorganizing Middle-Level Education: What To Consider and How To Proceed" (Ted A. Beranis); "Staff Development Programs for Middle Level Schools" (Donald C. Clark and Sally N. Clark); "Restructuring Middle Schools: Strategies for Using Turning Points" (Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark); "Leadership in the Middle Level School: An Imperative for Excellence" (Robert Shockley, Larry Holt, and Yvonne Meichtry); and "School Restructuring: A Leadership Challenge for Middle Level Administrators" (Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark.) (LMI)

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SCHOOLS IN THE MIDDLE

A Decade of Growth and Change

SALLY N. CLARK

DONALD C. CLARK

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Preface

The decade of the 1980s represented a period of renewed interest in and growth of middle level schools throughout the United States. The National Association of Secondary School Principals, long one of the nation's largest and most powerful professional associations, played an important leadership role in promoting the needs of young adolescents and calling for reform in middle level schools.

Throughout the past decade, NASSP's efforts in middle level education were coordinated by Deputy Executive Director George Melton. Melton, who assumed the position in the summer of 1980, after more than 30 years as a middle level teacher and administrator, brought to the association a vision of what middle level schools could be and what NASSP could do to assist middle level administrators in developing successful schools.

During his 10 years as deputy executive director, Melton established the Council on Middle Level Education, the *Middle Level Agenda for Excellence* series, *Schools in the Middle*, and National Middle Level Education Week. Increased emphasis was placed on middle level issues at the national conventions, conferences were expanded, and the Forrest E. Long Conference was created. NASSP also sponsored three major grade-level research shadow studies during this time.

The *Schools in the Middle* newsletter was inaugurated by Melton in 1981. Since that time more than 40 editions of *Schools in the Middle* have been sent to middle level educators who are members of NASSP. These articles, which focus on the melding of theory and practice, reflect exemplary middle level practices, issues, and concerns about early adolescents during the past decade.

This volume is a collection of 30 of the *Schools in the Middle* newsletters that were published from 1981 through 1990. No attempt has been made to comprehensively cover the field of middle level education; our intent is to provide a collection of articles that are representative of the major issues and concerns addressed.

The concept of *Schools in the Middle* illustrates the passion and vision that George Melton has for middle level education. The articles periodically reminded of us of our mission as middle level educators, gently urged us to be more responsive to the needs of early adolescents, and offered us ideas on how to make the "impossible possible." To George Melton, we thank you for your enlightened leadership and warm friendship. We dedicate this book to you.

Sally N. Clark
Donald C. Clark

Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, educators have been concerned about the education of early adolescents and the implementation of programs that are developmentally responsive to the needs of this unique group of young people.

Throughout its 90-year history, the middle level movement has gone through periods of both high energy and benign neglect. Since its beginning, however, middle level educators have been inspired by a group of leaders who sought to improve the quality of education for early adolescents.

These leaders who have guided us through the "peaks and valleys" include Thomas Briggs, Harl Douglass, William Gruhn, John Lounsbury, Gordon Vars, and William Alexander. They were and are on the forefront of defining and clarifying the meaning of middle level education. Their vision of what middle level education should be forms the foundation on which current developmentally responsive middle level schools are being built.

Although the progress has been slow, the work of these educators and many others provided the impetus for the dynamic change and growth that took place during the past decade.

Throughout the 1980s, middle level schools were changing. While programmatic changes were gradual, many schools, in an effort to recognize and respond to the earlier onset of puberty, changed grade-level configurations. In the mid-1980s the 6-7-8 grade level configuration became the predominant middle level grade organization, replacing the 7-8-9 configuration. Recent studies (Cawelti, 1988; Alexander and McEwin, 1989; and Epstein and Mac Iver, 1990), while not endorsing any one grade-level configuration as being superior, noted that programs identified as being developmentally responsive were more likely to be found in 6-7-8 schools.

Efforts in the education of future middle level teachers and administrations made some gains during the decade. Most significant were the efforts of the National Middle School Association, which worked cooperatively with the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education in the development of standards for middle level teacher preparation. These new standards, which affect both undergraduate and graduate programs, will have an important impact on middle level teacher education.

The importance of developmentally responsive middle level schools has also become a concern of major national foundations. The Carnegie Corporation, in addition to its Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents' report *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* is also

funding large grants to states to promote more effective middle level education. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation is also providing funding to support urban middle level schools, and the Eli Lilly Foundation is providing money to assist schools and districts in developing more responsive middle level schools.

A Decade of Research and Study

The renewed interest in middle level education during this decade led to numerous studies about middle level schools, programs, and the early adolescents they serve. NASSP led the way with its two-volume study of the middle level principalship. Co-sponsored by the Geraldine Dodge Foundation, the study provided insights on the organization of American middle level schools and the principals who administered them (Valentine et al., 1981; Keefe et al., 1983).

Important work was also done by Joan Lipsitz (1984) who described developmentally responsive middle level programs in four diverse schools. George and Oldaker (1985), who identified components of 130 successful middle level schools, verified that programs such as interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories effectively meet the specialized needs of early adolescents.

During this time, three grade-level shadow studies, which provided new insights into the impact of middle level programs on the lives of early adolescents, were conducted: *How Fares the Ninth Grade?*, *Life in the Three Sixth Grades*, and *Inside Grade Eight: From Apathy to Excitement*. Growing out of these studies was the increasing awareness that to be responsive to early adolescents, programs must function in the ways they were intended to function.

Interdisciplinary teaming without integrated content or active learning has no more impact than do conventional programs. Teacher advisories that fail to provide supportive services for students are no more effective than the old homeroom concept.

It is fitting that the decade closed with three important studies on the status of middle level education and a major foundation report which made recommendations for middle level school improvement. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1988) and Alexander and McEwin (1989) conducted nationwide studies of middle level schools. The data reflect the programs, school organization patterns, and demographics of middle level schools in the United States.

The Center for Research in Elementary and Middle Schools—Johns Hopkins University's national study (1990) has provided middle level educators with data that support the effectiveness of programs such as interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories. Their data also provide important information about organization of effective teams and the emphases of successful advisory programs.

Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, the report of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, was perhaps the most important middle level document of the decade. As the country's first national report that focused exclusively on the education of young adolescents, its recommendations for effective middle level schools reinforced many of the beliefs held by middle level educators and supported many current developmentally appropriate middle level school practices.

At the same time, it explored new areas of curriculum and instruction and stressed the importance of cooperative efforts of educators, parents, community members and agencies, and local business in middle level restructuring. The report provided suggestions for school improvement as well as challenges to create developmentally responsive schools for all early adolescents.

Schools in the Middle: A Reflection of Middle Level Education in the 1980s

During the 1980s, major emphasis was placed on defining middle level education—what it was and what it could become. Some attempted to examine responsive schools from the perspective of grade-level organization while others defined responsive schools by the nature of the programs that existed in the schools.

Middle level schools were often divided into middle schools and junior high schools with middle schools being characterized as those schools hav-

ing interdisciplinary teams, teacher advisories, transitional programs, and intramurals. Junior high schools were thought to be unresponsive and characterized by single subject schedules, inflexibility, and interscholastic sports.

Toward the middle of the decade, definitions based on grade-level structure and programs gave way to more thoughtful ways of defining developmental responsiveness. NASSP's Council on Middle Level Education began to identify broader concepts of developmental responsiveness that would apply to all middle level schools regardless of grade-level configuration or school programs.

The work of Lipsitz was particularly significant in defining developmentally responsive schools, and middle level schools began to be defined in terms of positive school climate, school culture, quality of life, student centeredness, and mission statements that focused on excellence and developmental appropriateness.

As the end of the decade neared, researchers sought to document what middle level schools were really like. Using surveys, they chronicled middle level schools across the nation, reporting organizational trends, programs, and practices. Some researchers also examined the substance of middle level education and sought to determine the impact of middle level programs on the lives of early adolescents.

While efforts were being made to define and describe middle level schools, some middle level educators were examining what middle level schools might be. Not only were these educators looking into the crystal ball, they were warning about the threats to the hard-fought gains of the decade. They described the pressures of the national reports and the threats that these might "trickle down" to middle level schools and narrow the range of opportunities for responsive programs for early adolescents.

These same writers encouraged middle level educators to be vigilant in protecting the interests of their students and to be vocal in promoting middle level education.

Developmentally Responsive Programs

At the same time that middle level educators were looking at what middle level schools were and could be, a great deal of activity focused on designing and implementing developmentally responsive programs.

Middle level teachers and administrators were eager to know how to organize, design, and install such programs as interdisciplinary teaming, teacher advisories, and transition programs. They asked questions about the appropriateness of grouping practices, gifted programs, and interscholastic sports, and they looked to researchers to provide them with information to convince their constituencies of the efficacy of developmental responsiveness.

Middle Level Instruction

Instruction was also a "hot topic" for middle level teachers and administrators. They were looking for better ways to assist their young adolescents in the learning process. The concerns of the national educational agenda also affected middle level classroom instruction. Instructional issues such as teaching critical thinking, using cooperative learning, and time-on-task also became important to middle level educators.

Middle Level Curriculum

For most of the decade, curriculum issues dealt specifically with subject matter and how much of it should be required. While additional subject matter requirements were primarily a high school concern, some new requirements were imposed on middle level schools. Educators were pressured to "push down" some subject matter into the middle school so that high school students would be able to take more advanced courses. Typical of that concern was the increasing pressure placed on teaching algebra in the eighth grade.

Some middle level curriculum specialists were concerned about the broader curriculum issues of subject matter integration, values education, and the social curriculum. Despite the importance of these issues, for the most part they received very little attention.

School Restructuring

Another major trend in the 1980s was school restructuring. While restructuring affected all lev-

els of education, it was of particular importance to middle level educators who had already begun to reorganize, restructure, and reconceptualize their schools. The buzz words were teacher empowerment, cooperative decision making, collaboratively developed mission statements, and visionary leadership.

Again, administrators, many of whom had received little or no preparation in successfully dealing with the "change process," were being asked to make significant changes in their school. Middle level researchers and writers responded by addressing restructuring and the leadership skills necessary to bring about positive and lasting change.

While significant progress is being made in the implementation of developmentally responsive programs such as interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories, research indicates that these programs are not yet making all the hoped-for differences in student lives.

Efforts must be made in this current decade to make sure these programs function in ways they were intended to function, and writers and researchers must work collaboratively with teachers and administrators to achieve this goal.

This collection of *Schools in the Middle* reminds us of what has transpired during the past decade. The articles describe our dreams and our failures, our hopes and our fears. They provide us with the motivation to do better and information about how to improve our schools for the early adolescents we serve.

For some, this collection will provide a review; for others it will be new information. But for all of us, the *Schools in the Middle* articles will provide the foundation and inspiration on which we will build developmentally responsive schools that will ensure successful learning experiences for all early adolescents.

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Part I

Successful Middle Level Schools:

What They Are and What They Could Be

Successful Middle Level Schools:

A

What They Are

Defining middle level schools was an important issue in the 1980s. What are they? How are they organized? What makes them uniquely different from elementary and high schools? These were some of the crucial questions asked by middle level teachers, administrators, and parents of early adolescents.

In *Middle Level Schools as They Should and Could Be*, William Alexander discusses effective middle level schools and finds some common elements, such as emphasis on better articulation; meeting the unique needs of early adolescents; broader and more flexible programs; and exploration, experimentation, and innovation.

Alexander stresses that the needs of adolescents have never been so urgent and that in our society, responsive middle level education is a critical turning point in public education. Middle level educators must provide positive influences for early adolescents, many of whom come from single parent families, are latch-key children, and live at poverty levels.

According to Alexander, some of the major problems encountered by middle level educators in their efforts to develop more appropriate programs for their students are lack of specially prepared middle level personnel; skepticism, apathy, resistance to change, and ignorance; and continued dominance of secondary programs. He concludes by suggesting that middle level administrators demand specially prepared middle level personnel, advocate a three-level administrative organization of schooling (elementary, middle level, and high school) and implement all essential elements currently lacking in their schools.

What are those essential elements? In *A Consumer's Guide to Middle Level Education*, the NASSP Council on Middle Level Education identifies them as integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. The Council explains how administrators can use each of these elements as reference points for determining the appropriateness of program changes for middle level schools. The Council members also provide the reader with a glossary of terms commonly used by middle level educators.

In examining middle level school effectiveness in *Four Climates of Effective Middle Level Schools*, J. Howard Johnston draws from the research and his experiences as a school visitor in the U. S. Department of Education Secondary School Recognition Program. He summarizes the 14 characteristics of effective schools and concludes that the installation of these characteristics is not enough.

He addresses the critical question of "How do you create the culture of an effective school?" He

then examines four categories of school climate he found in effective schools. These include physical, academic, social-emotional, and organizational.

In concluding his article, Johnston contends that the 14 characteristics are not as difficult to influence as is the school culture. He states that the creation of school culture depends more on the behavior of adults in the school than on characteristics of students, economic climate in the community, per-pupil expenditures, physical facilities, or a host of other variables.

Six Common Denominators

In *Common Denominators in Effective Middle Level Schools* and *Site Visitor's Report on Effective Middle Level Schools*, James Garvin and William Kerewsky also write about their experiences as school visitors in the U. S. Department of Education School Recognition program. Garvin identifies six common denominators of effectiveness in the schools, including:

1. A clearly defined and articulated mission
2. Effective leadership
3. Student-centered teachers
4. Strong parental involvement
5. Ongoing goal development and evaluation
6. Quality of life (high quality of adults in the schools who truly care about each other).

Not once did Garvin find that effectiveness was related to increased curriculum, extended school days or school year, or additional foreign language courses.

Kerewsky, based on his visitations, develops some broad generalizations about middle level schools. He found well-designed reading programs that were poorly implemented, little integration of subject matter, traditional seating and instructional patterns, and a growing trend toward academic and athletic competition. He also found teachers and administrators who were enthusiastic about their profession and openly cared about the youngsters for whom they were responsible.

In examining leadership at these schools, Kerewsky discovered principals with positive attitudes toward staff and students, principals who were dynamic and assertive, and principals who were responsive and spent much time communicating with parents, teachers, and students. Based on his observations, he suggests 12 characteristics of effective middle schools.

In *Middle Level School Grades and Program Development*, Conrad Toepfer addresses maturational concerns and the earlier onset of pubescence as issues in determining grade levels included in middle level schools. He points out that while the 6-7-8 grade level configuration is the fastest growing school organization pattern in the nation, the advantages and disadvantages must be studied carefully.

Toepfer contends that regardless of the school organization or program changes, the success or failure of schools to be developmentally responsive ultimately depends on the degree of teacher involvement in determining such changes.

He advocates defining middle level programs as separate entities from elementary or high school programs and stresses the importance of articulation among the three tiers of the education hierarchy.

Earmarks of Good Schools

It seems fitting that we return to William Alexander for the concluding article of this section. In *Schools in the Middle: Progress 1968–1988*, Alexander is joined by C. Kenneth McEwin in reporting the findings of a 1988 national study of middle level schools. Findings of this study are also compared with a similar study conducted by Alexander in 1968.

The findings focus on "six earmarks of good middle level schools":

1. An interdisciplinary organization, with a flexibly scheduled day
2. An adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan
3. A full-scale exploratory program
4. A comprehensive curriculum—providing for the broad goals of personal development, continued learning of skills, and basic knowledge
5. Varied and effective instructional methodology for the age group
6. Continued orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers.

Alexander and McEwin compare middle school types and junior high school types in relation to the implementation of the "earmarks of good middle level schools." They report that developmentally appropriate programs such as interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories are more likely to be found in 6-7-8 schools than in 7-8-9 schools.

The authors conclude by stating that "the earmarks against which we checked some of our data about school characteristics should be present in all good schools in the middle, although we expect that changes will develop and other earmarks will be added. Continued discussion, experimentation, and evaluation are essential for agreement on the essential goals and practices of schools in the middle."

MAY 1986

Middle Level Schools as They Should and Could Be

by William M. Alexander

On March 13, 1986, The National Council on Junior High/Middle School Administration, Inc., joined with NASSP in the sponsorship of a Middle Level Conference at Williamsburg, Va.

At that conference, William M. Alexander delivered the Forrest E. Long Distinguished Middle Level Lecture. This Schools in the Middle *includes the text of that address.*

My purpose here is to help us think about where we are and where we ought to be and can go in middle level education. To this end I shall address three points:

- There is much agreement as to what the middle level school should be, regardless of what it is called
- The need for such a special school is very great, but certain restricting factors must be overcome to attain it
- The school needed can be if middle level educators get at certain tasks and steps.

Agreements About the Middle Level School's Functions

Examination of the writings of early leaders in the junior high school movement and of those in the later middle school one reveals much unanimity as to what the respective middle level schools should be, regardless of grades included and whether called junior high, intermediate, middle, upper elementary school, or just "school in the middle."

Several reasons for the junior high school cited by George Melton[1] and those for the middle school cited by this writer[2] are very similar. Beliefs as to what the middle level school should be have persisted over some 75 years as American education moved from the first schools in the middle to its some 12,000 middle grade organizations now.

Better articulation of the elementary and secondary schools has been and remains a major reason and also a major specification for the middle level school. Whether the reference is to "articulation" or "transition" or "bridging," and all of these terms appear frequently, the idea is clear: provide for better continuity in education.

The first issue (September 1929) of *Clearing House*, for which Forrest E. Long shared editorial responsibility, included a commentary on the report of the Commission on the Articulation of the Units of American Education calling for greater articulation.[3] Another early leader in the development of the junior high school, Thomas Briggs, identified "to bridge the gap between the elementary grades and secondary education" as the first one in his enumeration of the critical needs for junior high schools.[4]

Yet a generation later Mauritz Johnson[5] charged in an article about the junior high school as "Education's Problem Child," that "many schools ... have been less than successful" in serving the bridging function. Speaking at a Junior High School Conference Johnson conducted at Cornell University the following summer (1963) I summarized the beliefs of many educators that "the bridge was fundamentally a vestibule added at the front door of the high school."[6]

And so, we middle school advocates proposed the middle school to remedy the situation and provide the transitional program the junior high school had difficulty providing because, many believed, of the presence of the ninth grade and its usual inclusion in college entrance and graduation requirements of the high

school. Surveys of middle schools in 1967 and 1977 asking the reasons for their establishment found the bridging function a very popular one, 40 percent citing this in the former and 62.7 percent in the latter survey.[7]

Meeting unique needs of the age group has been a consistent emphasis in the literature of middle level education, which has given special emphasis in the last 20 years to the needs of children passing through pubescence from childhood to adolescence.

Even 20 years ago Briggs cited as the second need for junior high schools: "to provide for the needs of children in early adolescence," and adolescence now comes at least a year earlier. And Briggs' third need for the junior high school was the closely related guidance function, "to direct them intelligently toward work or advanced study."

Another major justification of the middle school has been this same matter of the unique needs of the preadolescent and early adolescent youngsters. Proponents of the school in the middle have wanted more than a bridge, important as it is—a separate unit to make a *three-level* school system: elementary, middle, and high school.

The problem in dealing with these "transescents," as Eichhorn[8] called them in his pioneer study of the middle school, has been the extreme variability of the group. The great anthropologist Margaret Mead called our attention in 1965 to the fact that "junior high school students are more unlike each other than they have ever been before or ever will be again in the course of their lives."[9]

No simple, uniform program works for the age 10-14 group. But the schools in the middle have great difficulties escaping the tyranny of uniform standards and expectations of even this most diverse population, as well as the uniform schedules, tests, and grading systems which implement these standards and expectations.

A broader, more flexible program than the elementary school (and also the college prep high school) provides, has been sought throughout the 75 years. Dropout rates did drop and we believe that motivation for learning continues to increase.

Melton stated in his account of the junior high school that "the advancement of the concept of exploration is one of the major keynotes of junior high school success." As he also noted, however, there has been too much reliance on a limited set of exploratory courses and too little effort to provide exploratory experiences in every curriculum area.

The middle school concept embraced heartily the notion of exploration, and the newer schools in the middle in many cases have introduced earlier exploratory courses and activities; but in recent years academic time pressures have tended to restrict the exploratory programs of the middle level.

Experimentation and innovation were also listed in Melton's chapter as an aim and accomplishment of the junior high schools; almost one out of four respondents in my 1967 survey of middle school practices and Brooks' 1977 replication, and almost one in three of the NASSP's 1980 survey checked "to try out various innovations" as a purpose of the middle school organization.[10] This hope remains a strong one in middle level education, despite the current surge of resistance to change.

Various administrative/organizational and other arguments for the school in the middle have been influential. Adjustment to increasing school population and building shortages were a major factor in junior high school growth, as school populations grew in the 1920s and later. This enrollment/building situation has also been a significant factor in middle school development, especially as the addition of kindergartens could be facilitated by moving the sixth grade to the junior high school, and the ninth to the high school with its available space. Desegregation has also been a factor in some localities, although not a major one nationally. Undoubtedly the sentiment for getting grade 9 back into the high school has accelerated the middle level movement.

The need for middle level schools as they should be was never so urgent, but several factors still hinder their widespread optimum development.

Improved teacher education was one of four major arguments for the middle school cited in my Cornell speech of 1963 advocating a new middle school; Woodring's editorial in the *Saturday Review* a couple of years later on "The New School in the Middle" also argued this and was perhaps prophetic: "The emerging intermediate school creates a new demand for a new kind of teacher education that will differ substantially from the preparation of either primary or high school teachers. If this challenge is met in time, and if those

who plan the schools show imagination and courage, the new school organization can contribute greatly to the improvement of educational quality."[11]

Unfortunately, as will be commented on later, the challenge has not been met thus far and the consequent threat to middle level education is great.

Summarizing our progress in middle level education for these past 75 years, wide agreement is now seen, at least in the literature, as to what the middle level should be and be for:

> A broader, more flexible program than the elementary school (and also the college prep high school) provides, has been sought throughout the 75 years.

- A strong bridge between the elementary and high school
- A separate school focused on the unique needs of transescents (children between childhood and adolescence, generally in the 10 to 14-year-old group)
- A broad, flexible program encouraging development of lifelong learning skills and interests
- A school encouraging experimentation and innovation
- A school focused to serve these purposes, not other primarily extraneous ones.

These beliefs incorporate, and square very well with those of such early junior high leaders as Long, Briggs, Gruhn, and NASSP committees, with several early middle school advocates and the National Middle School Association, as well as with the Middle Level Council of NASSP.

We can and should use the term "middle level" to cover all schools created to serve this age group. The "school in the middle" is the most descriptive term, but it is too long, and perhaps we may as well accept the evidence of the relative growth of the middle school organization and its popularity and adopt for all schools in the middle the name "middle school." This term will stick, I believe, if we work seriously at the job of making the middle school be what it really should be and can be.

Today's Need for Middle Level Schools

The need for middle level schools as they should be was never so urgent, but several factors still hinder their widespread optimum development. In addition to the needs for these schools already cited, two particular ones add special urgency now.

First, the increasing demands of our society for lifelong learners place a great premium on teaching students so that they become their own teachers and continue learning after school days end, indeed throughout their lifetime.

The middle level is most critical. Here is where learning skills must be acquired or learning almost forever handicapped; where boys and girls turn to positive, socially acceptable, persistent behavior or to the transitory, futile skills and interests, or even to negative, evil ones; where failure and frustration mean early dropout, and frequently the creation of a social burden.

Our society expects people to be workers and successful workers must increasingly be capable learners, frequently of new trades and careers. The middle level is a highly crucial turning point in public education.

Second, there is great need for positive influences on the transescent's personal development. The school remains the one institution directly and positively, we hope, influencing the lives of virtually all children of middle school years. Large numbers of these children live in one-parent families or without a parent, many of them below the poverty level—no home schooling for these, and certainly no tutors or private schools; vandalism and crime beckon. For many, wholesome recreation and work experience are lacking.

Recent surveys[12] report increasing teenage pregnancies and a distressing use of alcohol and illicit drugs by middle level students. The December 9, 1985, issue of *Time* with its cover photo of a pregnant young girl and the title "Children Having Children," was a dramatic reminder of the statistics regarding the growing number of teenage pregnancies in the United States, with the largest increase recently in the under-15-year-olds.

Regrettable as is the absence or ineffectiveness of the home and other social institutions, the school is expected to do its share and more.

Senator Moynihan's book, *Family and Nation*, predicts that within 10 years the majority of 17-year-olds will come from broken families. He cites data showing the lower achievement of children in one-parent families and notes that these students are consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action, and more than twice as likely as two-parent children to give up on school altogether.[13]

We must note, too, that many middle school students, whether or not from broken homes, are "latch-key children" returning from school to a home where there is no adult for a couple of hours or longer—and at the very age when various undesirable temptations sometimes become attractive. Yes, there is great need for all

of the good education, good guidance, and good supervision the middle level school can provide to help our children survive the shoals of adolescence.

Some Problems To Overcome

Certain factors have greatly restricted middle level schools in meeting such needs in the past and they continue to obstruct progress. Success in overcoming certain ones is essential to achieving the schools that should be.

The continuing lack of trained personnel that many of us have hoped for has been a great limitation on the 75 years of effort toward middle level education. Nearly all of the people working in middle level schools were trained and certified for the elementary or high school.

Some remedial inservice education and benign certifying practices have made staffing the schools possible, but such measures rarely provide the motivation and commitment required for successful work at this level. The middle level, too, needs personnel who have chosen to work there, and who have had special training for their sometimes difficult and always challenging assignments.

> Better articulation of the elementary and secondary schools has been and remains a major reason and also a major specification for the middle level school.

Ken McEwin's and my 1981 survey of member teacher education institutions of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education found that only 30 percent of these institutions offered any kind of special programs and courses for teachers at the middle level, and even fewer providing these for middle level counselors and principals.[14] Principals and other school leaders generally regard the lack of specially trained personnel as a major hindrance to developing a true middle level school.

Unfortunately, 75 years of uncertainty and conflicting opinions as to whether to have schools in the middle, and if so what school, have left sore spots that must be healed by growing consensus and achievement. Skepticism, apathy, resistance to change have hindered the middle level movement and must still be dispelled. And ignorance of the middle level is probably our worst enemy. Ignorance on the part of the many citizens who did not attend a school in the middle, and on the part of many professional educators, even education editors and authors, restricts the movement. This will continue until informed references to the middle level are made by editors, professors and authors, especially in education, and by the media as we help their representatives learn about the newcomer in school organization.

Continued dominance of the secondary education program and structure also hinders the middle level development. The tendency to reach up to the next level for models is universal, but it interferes, indeed conflicts at times with our efforts to make the middle school level unique, separate, and influential.

In some of the many educational studies and movements of the 1980s, the middle level has been overlooked, neglected, or perhaps worse, "lumped in" with the high school criticisms and recommendations. As we all well know, some state graduation requirements have been upped with a resultant loss of time and support for exploratory and other essential elements of middle level education.[15] So even a change of name does not guarantee our escaping the high school's problems.

The Tasks Ahead

The school that should be, can be if middle level educators accept several long-term goals or tasks and take a few related steps for each task very soon. Priorities cannot be stipulated—that is a local problem—but enough tasks and steps can be suggested that every concerned educator can find something to do *now*.

1. *Demand specially trained personnel*

- NASSP's Middle Level Council should join forces with the National Middle School Association to promote the latter's position paper just released on *Professional Certification and Preparation for the Middle Level*, or prepare and promote such a position of its own.
- Each middle level principal should find out what the situation regarding training is in his or her school. How many faculty members have special training for the middle level? What is the state certification situation?
- If certification is not specific in your state, set up in your district or school your own specifications for teachers, counselors, support personnel and administrators, and use these in your lobbying and your employment and staff development programs. The NMSA position paper lists the following as essential components of a middle level preparation program:

  a. A thorough study of the nature and needs of early adolescents

  b. Middle level curriculum and instruction

  c. A broad academic program, including concentration in at least two academic areas at the undergraduate level

d. Specialized methods and reading courses

e. Early and continuing field experiences in good middle level schools.[16]

- Get your state association to join interested groups such as affiliated units of the National Middle School Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, in working with your state department of education and your teacher education institutions.
- Perhaps through your association, evaluate the quality of your local staff development programs—it varies widely from district to district, consultant to consultant.
- Encourage the employment of middle level personnel who have special training when and as you can find them!

2. *Get administrative support for a three-level system.*

- Check whether you really have a three-level system. If not, what can you do to get it? If so, is there adequate interlevel planning and cooperation led by central administration?
- Do your superintendent and board of education really understand the purposes of middle level education? Help them. Provide opportunities for relevant reading, talking, explaining, questioning, observing schools in operation.
- Does the administration take leadership in organizing for and maintaining articulation? Is there full recognition of the adage that "a chain is as strong as its weakest link"? Is there mutual respect among the levels?
- By all means, enlist the elementary schools, and especially their teachers of the highest grade, whether 4, 5, or 6, in the orientation program. The last teacher(s) an incoming middle level student had in the elementary school may have had more influence on the student's attitudes and expectations about the middle level than any other person or any event.

3. *Implement all essential elements lacking in your school.*

- A statement of beliefs about the goals and elements of your middle level school is very important both for those who developed it and those who read it; several excellent national guides are available. For example, see NASSP's new *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, and NMSA's older *This We Believe*, both clear, short, good statements. Each school should make its statement available for discussion, possibly revision.
- Evaluate your school according to your listing of critical elements. Which are lacking? Which need to be improved? In my judgment the really critical ones are these:

a. An interdisciplinary organization, with a flexibly scheduled day

b. Adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan

c. A full-scale exploratory program

d. Curriculum provision for personal development, continued learning skills, and basic knowledge areas

e. Varied and effective instructional methodology for the age group

f. Continuing orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers.

- For each improvement decided upon, develop and implement a plan and schedule for planning, tryout, and adoption or further tryout or rejection. You may not be able to do all of this at once, or as fast as liked, but *do something*, and make it succeed.

Footnotes

[1]George E. Melton, "The Junior High School: Successes and Failures," Chapter II in *Perspectives: Middle School Education, 1964-84*, edited by John H. Lounsbury (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1984).

[2]William M. Alexander, "The Middle School Emerges and Flourishes," Chapter III in *Perspectives: Middle School Education, 1964-84*.

[3]Editorial, *Clearing House*, September 1929, pp. 1-2.

[4]Thomas H. Briggs, *Secondary Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), p. 97.

[5]Mauritz Johnson, Jr., "School in the Middle—Junior High: Education's Problem Child," *Saturday Review*, July 1962, pp. 40-42, 56.

[6]William M. Alexander, "The Junior High School: A Changing View," *NASSP Bulletin*, March 1964, pp. 15-24.

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[8]Donald H. Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1966).

[9]Margaret Mead, "Early Adolescence in the United States," *NASSP Bulletin*, April 1965, p. 10.

[10]See J. Valentine, D. C. Clark, N. C. Nickerson, Jr., and J. W. Keefe, *The Middle Level Principalship: A Survey of Middle Level Principals and Programs* (Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981), Table 106, p. 59.

[11]Paul Woodring, "The New Intermediate School," *Saturday Review*, October 16, 1965, p. 77.

[12]See "Adolescent Chemical Use," in Search Institute, *Source*, January 1986, and "Teen-Age Pregnancy," in Search Institute, *Source*, November 1985.

[13]Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Family and Nation* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 92-93.

[14]C. Kenneth McEwin and William M. Alexander, *The Status of Middle/Junior High School Teacher Education Programs: A Research Report* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian State University), 1982.

[15]See George E. Melton, "A Notion at Risk," *Middle School Journal*, May 1984.

[16]National Middle School Association, *Professional Certification and Preparation for the Middle Level* (Columbus, Ohio: The National Middle School Association, 1986), p. 5.

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A Consumer's Guide to Middle Level Education

Since people's basic adult values are set for the most part between ages 10 and 14 years, school improvement efforts need to give adequate attention to establishing "excellence" in middle level school programs.

The recommendations from recent national reports and commissions to improve secondary education make it particularly important that school improvement efforts recognize the essential functions of effective middle level school programs that focus on the total growth and development of youngsters, not only on their intellectual growth.

While most people understand the value of separate elementary and high school programs, they are less aware of the functions of and needs for separate schools and programs at the middle level. This *Consumer's Guide to Middle Level Education* is designed to help clarify the unique educational tasks of middle level education.

The Basic Functions of Middle Level Education

The basic functions of middle level education are integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. These functions have been goals of responsive middle level education ever since they were developed by William Gruhn in the early 1940s. (W. T. Gruhn and H. R. Douglas, *The Modern Junior High School*. New York: The Ronald Press, 1947.) Middle level school administrators can use these six basic functions as reference points for determining the appropriateness of any program changes for the middle level.

Integration. Middle level school students are no longer young children. At the same time, these youngsters do not yet have the same capacities as high school learners.

Middle level schools are most effective when they challenge skill development based on how a youngster thinks during *early* adolescence.

While they may physically look like 16-year-olds, we cannot assume that they can also think like 16-year-olds. In fact, very few middle level youngsters can be expected to perform consistently at the higher intellectual levels that normally develop when they are in high school.

Schools must offer learning experiences that do not frustrate them, but provide growth, challenge, and success during early adolescence. This is critical to continued achievement in high school.

College preparation must remain primarily a high school function. Because of the intellectual capacities of middle level students, college preparation is not appropriate as a major middle level school task. Instead, the middle level school should challenge middle level learners who demonstrate a more mature intellect. This will help them later in high school and college preparatory classes.

Effective learning in the middle level school combines a solid developmental program in all skill and content areas with opportunities for remediation, and the integration of intellectual and social skills into the students' repertoire of learning behavior. This can happen only when the program accommodates the

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(Developed by The Middle Level Education Council of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Alfred A. Arth, J. Howard Johnston, John H. Lounsbury, and Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr., Chairperson)

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unique needs, interests, and abilities of middle level students.

Exploration. Youngsters between the ages of 10 and 14 live through the most serious and traumatic changes that humans experience. The physiological, biological, social, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of these changes must be addressed in the school's exploratory program.

Exploratory subjects such as art, music, home economics, and industrial arts are important because they allow youngsters to explore their needs, interests, talents, and skills in these areas and use them as a basis for their educational goals in high school. The courses also allow students to use the facts, skills, and information learned in other classes (such as mathematics, science, social studies, and English) in projects and activities.

At this age, students can often better understand information learned in academic classes when they apply it to learning activities in the exploratory courses. Concepts such as mathematical formulae and scientific processes in industrial arts and home economics, and lines and angles in art make these exploratory courses vital learning experiences.

In addition, exploration calls for opportunities to participate in activities that interest students either academically or recreationally. Neither of these enrichment experiences should be considered unimportant. They are much more than mere educational "frills."

> Since people's basic adult values are set for the most part between ages 10 and 14 years, school improvement efforts need to give adequate attention to establishing "excellence" in middle level school programs.

The middle level school should help students examine a subject's use in their lives and help them apply what they learn in school to the "here and now" issues in their lives. Exploratory education of this kind is sound preparation for success in high school. Students are frustrated when high school kinds of experiences are forced on them before they have explored and developed their capacities to make the most of high school learning opportunities.

Guidance/Advisement. Guidance activities help students make intelligent decisions about present and future educational and pre-vocational choices. The emotional aspects of adjusting to the physiological, biological, social, and intellectual changes experienced during early adolescence are also a special concern in middle level school guidance programs.

Students need help to resolve both educational and personal problems they face during their middle school years. The services of trained guidance counselors and access to other specialized personnel such as school psychologists and social workers are necessary.

The functions of integration and exploration are important considerations as guidance personnel work with teachers and parents to plan the best and most appropriate program for each middle level student. The participation of guidance personnel both in planning and presenting special courses, such as drug, alcohol, and sex education, can make them more responsive to middle level student needs.

Adviser-advisee programs are often organized to provide further means for each student to interact regularly with a teacher who knows the child well. Here, school-related concerns can be discussed in a non-instructional setting. Groups of students are assigned to meet on a regular basis to discuss problems.

The adviser-advisee program is not meant to replace the trained counselor, but to support and supplement the counselor's role. Such programs also permit trained guidance personnel to work with individual students or with groups of students to deal with problems at their onset. Often these problems are of academic importance because they affect student learning.

Adviser-advisee programs are fundamental in developing a well-rounded and effective guidance program in the middle level school.

Even when a formal adviser-advisee program has not been developed, teachers at the middle level need to see themselves as teacher/advisers. Early adolescents have spontaneous advisement needs that the counselor who has 250 student advisees cannot possibly handle effectively and responsively. Excellence in middle level schools requires the development of broad guidance programs that provide this kind of academic and personal support for early adolescents.

Differentiation. Differentiation focuses on providing middle level programs and activities that respond to early adolescent development. Because the abilities of adolescents vary, the middle level school must provide adequate differentiation so each student can fulfill his or her potential. Areas of consideration include read-

ing level, level of thinking, attention spans, changing interests, and physical ability.

Alternative learning arrangements, materials, times, and approaches to management and control are required to deal with the educational needs of students during their middle level school years. What works for one student may not work for another. Between ages 10 and 14, some individuals will progress more slowly than they did during early childhood, while others of the same age will demonstrate high school level abilities.

Middle level schools need to present content and information in many different ways in order to accommodate the differences in students.

> The basic functions of middle level education are integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation.

Almost all the problems that arise between adults and early adolescents stem from the fact that most adults do not generally understand what is "normal" in this developmental phase of life. In some cases, they may understand such normalcy, but still not accept it in their own youngster. Excellence in middle level education requires educators who *do* understand and can accept these realities and who can help parents understand this period in their children's lives.

Socialization. Parents and laypersons seem to have less understanding of socialization than of any other middle level education function. The ways in which youngsters deal with members of their family and peer group reflect the dynamic changes that occur during pubescence.

Pubescence is a biological inevitability, but it occurs at different times and proceeds at different rates within each individual. Early and later adolescence, on the other hand, are not biological terms. They are terms that describe developmental stages. Both pubescence and adolescence deal with the youngster's understanding of his or her transition to adulthood.

Adults will often mistake early physical growth as an indication that the youngster also has early social maturity. In many cases, nothing could be further from the truth. Because social maturity stems from successful social interaction, the physically precocious youngster may, in fact, be at a serious disadvantage. Lacking social interaction with less developed agemates, the physically advanced young adolescent may be more immature than an agemate who looks 3 to 4 years younger.

Since we tend to judge a child's age by his or her physical maturity, we need to realize how vulnurable the physically advanced youngster may be to all sorts of serious problems.

Our images of a 13-year-old could range from those of children to young adults. This inability to categorize middle level youngsters' age by physical size and appearance poses a major problem for identifying and dealing with their socialization needs.

At the very least, such "children in adult bodies" are prey for sexual and commercial exploitation by the media. In effect, such youngsters need more, rather than less, social interaction with adults to gain the social maturity necessary to deal with their precocious growth patterns. Otherwise they may adopt the values inherent in the popular media as a substitute for positive influences by adults.

Thus, socialization is extremely critical in developing social maturity during the middle level school years. Social maturation during early adolescence depends on how realistically the youngster can deal with his or her physical growth and transformation toward biological adulthood.

As life outside the home takes on greater importance, the school becomes the major structured event for early adolescents. It provides interaction with agemates, peers, and significant adults. Youngsters spend a major portion of their waking hours in the school environment where they meet and work with individuals from the entire spectrum of physical and social development. The school must help early adolescents learn social skills to communicate and interact effectively with this wide range of people. These skills will be needed to deal with the diverse issues that they will continue to face throughout their lives.

> . . . very few middle level youngsters can be expected to perform consistently at the higher intellectual levels that normally develop when they are in high school.

Articulation. As the link between the elementary and high school, the middle level school program should be planned and coordinated as part of the entire K-12 experience. The expectations for effective middle level schools must be firmly rooted in how the middle level program helps the student bridge the gap between elementary and high school.

The changes that children begin to make in their growth and maturation in the final stages of elementary school cannot be overlooked. Articulation seeks to minimize gaps and overlap in program and learning expectation as students move from one school unit or program to the next. Thus, the middle level school program must be planned in cooperation with the elementary school. The planning should encompass both academic matters and human developmental concerns.

> Because of the intellectual capacities of middle level students, college preparation is not appropriate as a major middle level school task.

Likewise, the planning of the high school program must start from what students have been able to master in their middle level years. We must accept the differentiation in rates of growth and maturation among students in their early adolescence. All students cannot be expected to be "ready" to learn as mature adolescents upon their entrance into the high school.

Thus, articulation also means that the effective high school should be prepared to teach subjects using a wider range of instructional alternatives for students entering its domain. Articulation of program from middle level to high school requires the same cooperative planning between both levels as is necessary when students depart from elementary schools.

A Glossary of Middle Level Terms

The following is a glossary of terms commonly used in discussions about middle level schools and programs.

Adviser-Advisee Program. Regularly scheduled times are established during which each student has the opportunity to interact with peers and/or a teacher about school-oriented and personal concerns. This allows teachers to become involved in general advising with students at the classroom level and recommend students with special needs to the guidance staff and/or parents for follow-up.

Block Schedule. Scheduling that provides large blocks of time in which individual teachers or teams of teachers can organize and arrange flexible groupings of students for varied periods of time. This allows teachers to plan for specific instructional needs without disrupting the schedule of the entire school. This also can allow a qualified teacher to teach English and social studies to a single class of students for the equivalent of two class periods, can decrease the number of students the teacher sees daily, and can double the time the teacher spends with each student.

Common Learnings. That portion of the curriculum considered essential for every student, regardless of station or future occupational plans. This translates into general education content, skills, and information which all youth need to learn.

Common Planning Time. Regularly scheduled time during the school day during which several staff members who teach the same students have the same period(s) available for joint planning, parent conference, or materials preparation. This opportunity encourages a more comprehensive view of each student and his or her educational needs and enhances the integration of subject areas and skills.

> Adviser-advisee programs are fundamental in developing a well-rounded and effective guidance program in the middle level school.

Continuous Progress. A system that enables a student to move through a learning program on the basis of successful completion of learning objectives at his/her own rate of speed without skipping or repeating. This approach uses individual and small group activities to allow learners to achieve maximum progress by working at their own rates. It replaces the inaccurate notion that all learners can and should move ahead at the same pace and allows students to progress at their own changing rates to learn particular skills and information. It may be implemented in individual classes or on a schoolwide basis.

Correlated Curriculum. A curriculum arrangement that features a conscious and planned effort to relate various subjects to one another. For example, the English class might study a novel at the same time the history class is studying the period in which the novel was set.

Developmental Age Characteristics. The developmental age characteristics of early adolescence are those common characteristics that occur for virtually all humans between 10 and 14 years of age. They consist of those physical, social, emotional, and intellectual characteristics which, when taken as a whole, indicate an individual's development relative to others during this period of life. Some youngsters will experience their physiological growth spurt as early as age 10,

Students need help to resolve both educational and personal problems they face during their middle school years.

while others may not experience this development until age 14.

Early Adolescence. The developmental stage youngsters experience as they approach and begin to achieve puberty. This usually occurs between 10 and 14 years of age and deals with the youngster's achievement of the developmental age characteristics previously identified. See "Transescence" for a description of this early adolescent developmental process.

Exploration. Curriculum experiences designed to provide learnings that help youngsters explore their changing needs, aptitudes, and interests. Exploratory programs include regularly scheduled experiences in both the academic (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) program; special interest areas such as art, business, foreign languages, home economics, industrial arts, and music; and purely interest-centered experiences.

Heterogeneous Grouping. A grouping strategy that does not divide learners into groups based on their ability or learning achievement. It is utilized in program situations in which students can learn from others although they have wide ranges in ability and achievement from each other.

Homogeneous Grouping. A grouping strategy that divides students into groups organized around specific levels of ability, achievement, and interest. It is utilized in program situations where narrow and common ranges in student backgrounds make for more effective teaching and learning, and is the basis for approaches such as special education, gifted and talented education, competitive performing groups, and the like.

Independent Study or *Contract Learning.* Learning activities in which the student is largely self-directed, although the teacher offers advice to the choice of goals, topic of study, methods, and evaluation of the independent study experience.

A student might, for instance, define an area of special interest in oceanography. For independent study, the student could work out goals and develop a study contract with her/his science teacher to undertake a particular program of study or investigation and pursue the independent study project in the library during free time or after school.

The student would meet with the teacher as necessary for help, review, presentation of information studied, and evaluation. Students might present their independent study projects to the class as they deal with the class' study plans.

Individualized Instruction. Instruction that provides alternate routes and rates for student achievement of common or unique objectives, based on diagnosed student needs. Individualized Instruction can either help the student concentrate on other areas in which

Because the abilities of adolescents vary, the middle level school must provide adequate differentiation so each student can fulfill his or her potential.

additional or special help is needed or provide enrichment in an area where proficiency has already been established.

Integrated Curriculum. A curriculum design that seeks to tie various subjects together. Aspects of this approach were defined earlier as Correlated Curriculum.

Interdisciplinary Programs. Instructional programs that combine subject matter ordinarily taught separately, such as history, literature, science, etc., into learnings under a single organizational structure. This would take advantage of Correlated Curriculum and Integrated Curriculum approaches.

Interdisciplinary Teams. Two to five teachers representing different subject areas form a team that uses common student groups to organize their instructional program. The team of teachers shares the same students, schedule, areas of the school, and occasionally

the responsibility for teaching more than one subject. This utilizes Block Schedule techniques and puts curriculum planning, grouping, and scheduling decisions in the hands of the team of teachers who are aware of the changing instructional needs of students on their team.

The middle level school should help students examine a subject's use in their lives and help them apply what they learn in school to the "here and now" issues in their lives.

Intermediate School. A middle level school organization that usually includes at least grades 7 and 8. These two grades are the ones that are most characteristically different from elementary and high schools. Most intermediate schools include grades 5 through 8 and organize the school district program into three units of grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12.

Junior High School. A middle level school organization that traditionally includes only grades 7, 8, and 9. This program provides a separate school unit and program between the elementary and high school based on the characteristics of early adolescence different from those of both early childhood and later adolescence.

Learning Centers. A station or center organized in a specific location of the school or classroom and organized as a station from which a student can pursue independent learning.

Learning Resource Center or Media Center. The centrally located place in the school where print and non-print media are stored, organized, and made available to students and staff. In addition to books, periodicals, filmstrips, audio and videotapes, etc., the equipment needed to use them and systems for their utilization are provided.

Middle Level Education. The term used to indicate the category of school units and organizations separate from elementary and high schools that attempt to deal with the unique needs of 10 to 14-year-old youngsters. The programs in middle level schools offer various combinations of grades 5 through 9.

Middle School. A middle level school organization that usually includes grades 6, 7, and 8. The middle school was built on a rationale that most 6th, 7th, and 8th graders demonstrate learning and human characteristics similar to those formerly found among 7th, 8th, and 9th grade youngsters. This earlier maturity means that most 9th graders have more in common with high school students as peers than they do with younger students.

Mini-Courses. Short-term courses, often non-academic and usually within an exploratory program, which may last from 4 to 12 weeks in length. Mini-Courses are typically centered on a particular activity or a topic; they may supplement or replace regular year-long courses. Examples include: guitar laboratory, basic computer literacy, electronic music, macrame, rocket building, and other interest centers common among young adolescents.

Modular Schedule. A scheduling strategy that utilizes small amounts of time called modules. These can be linked together to form periods of various lengths.

The basic time unit or module is usually 10 or 15 minutes. Course times and activities can be assigned variable time periods depending on the kinds of learning activities (demonstration, discussion, experiments, laboratory, lecture, library review, testing, etc.) which have been planned to meet learning needs on particular days and weeks during the school term or year.

Middle level schools need to present content and information in many different ways in order to accommodate the differences in students.

Multi-Age Grouping. Students from more than one grade or age level are placed in the same class to facilitate Continuous Progress (see earlier definition) and develop long term interpersonal relationships between teachers and among students themselves.

This practice is based on research indicating that achievement, interest, physiological development, social maturity, emotional readiness, and intellectual levels of students may be overlooked when grouping is based solely upon chronological age.

Peer Counseling. Under the direction of counselors, middle level school students may share experiences and viewpoints that may benefit other students facing similar problems. The emphasis is on sharing successes in dealing with problems and defining ways of coping

positively with problem areas. This is not an effort to place students in the responsibilities or roles of counseling.

Peer Teaching. The planned use of students in a tutorial role. Students who have learned successfully help students who have not yet succeeded in that area.

Peer teaching allows students to work together and share successes in a specific learning task or problem. The advantage for students is that quite often one can better understand something by explaining and communicating it to someone else. This approach can help students discover new ways to solve a particular learning problem.

> (This) inability to categorize middle level youngsters' age by physical size and appearance poses a major problem for identifying and dealing with their socialization needs.

School-Within-a-School. Also known as the house plan or little school, this grouping strategy is designed to reduce the impact of large numbers of students in a single school by dividing students into sub-schools or little schools, each with its own faculty. The school-within-a-school pattern's major objective is successful transition from the smallest of the self-contained, single teacher classroom found in many elementary schools to the larger departmentalized school environment in secondary schools.

Self-Contained Teachers or Classrooms. An arrangement in which students learn most subjects from a single teacher. Still the predominant approach in elementary schools, the concept allows the teacher to become familiar with students by dealing with fewer numbers of students while teaching most subjects to them. The demands for specialization have limited the effective use of the self-contained approach in middle level schools.

Team Planning. The process followed by a group of teachers who plan interdependent instructional objectives, evaluation procedures, and management techniques appropriate to the group of students in their charge. This provides the necessary subject matter specialization required beyond the elementary grades and helps teachers on the team become aware of holistic needs of students on their team. Team planning can achieve fairness and consistency of expectations for teachers.

Team Teaching. Two or more teachers share the responsibility for planning, conducting, and evaluating learning experiences for a common group of students. Team teaching grows out of team planning but cannot function without the foundation of team planning described above.

Team planning allows teachers to plan interdependent learning objectives but team teaching extends this into commonly planned classroom procedures and activities. Team teaching becomes a formalized approach to instructional strategies and tactics.

Transescence. A term specifically created to describe the developmental tasks that usually occur during ages 10 to 14 years. Donald H. Eichhorn (*The Middle School*. New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1966, p. 3.) described the concept: "The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development (see Developmental Age Characteristics), the transescent designation is based upon the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes in body chemistry that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex changes."

Unified Arts/Allied Arts A coordinated program that provides exploratory opportunities within the humanities, the practical arts, and the fine arts. This component is an essential part of an effective middle level school program.

Conclusion

This *Consumer's Guide to Middle Level Education* has sought to increase the reader's understanding of the basic functions of middle level education and basic middle level educational terminology. Such an understanding is critical to success in developing excellence in schools which serve early adolescents.

Middle level schools serve early adolescents who are approaching or are already involved in the greatest human change that people experience in their lives. Excellence in middle level education can best be achieved by developing school programs which respond to the ways that youngsters actually learn and grow between ages 10 and 14 years.

We recommend the following sources to those who would like further information on middle level education. From the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Va. 22091:

"Coming of Age," 1982. A musical play written by a middle school parent which is uniquely effective in helping students, lay persons, and educators understand the problems facing this age group. It is available as a play for production in schools or on videocassette or 16 mm film for use with educator or parent groups. A series of study modules are available which deal with the issues considered in "Coming of Age."

On the Threshold of Adolescence: A Statement on Schools in the Middle and the Students They Serve, 1983. This brief overview highlights the central issues and tasks which schools and their communities should consider in planning ways to meet the educational needs of this age group.

"Why a School in the Middle?" Available on an 18 minute videocassette or 16mm film. A presentation developed for lay and community groups on the key reasons why the education of early adolescents is best served with a school program separate from that of both the elementary and high school. School program elements essential to an effective middle level educational program are discussed with scenes of programs in action in some of the nation's highly effective middle level schools.

For ordering information, contact NASSP Publication Sales, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091

From the National Middle School Association, Post Office Box 14882, Columbus, Ohio 43214:

"In Search of Excellence: The National Reports—Implications for Middle Schools." John Swaim, Richard Needham and Associates, 1984. A documentation of the excellence and contemporary achievements of middle level education which the recent national reports have either failed to identify or overlook.

This We Believe. John H. Lounsbury, (Ed.) 1982. A detailed statement for lay persons on the essential characteristics of effective middle level schools.

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Four Climates of Effective Middle Level Schools

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Certain reliable trends seem to emerge from the research on school effectiveness. These are commonly summarized as 14 characteristics of effective schools:

1. Clear academic and behavioral goals
2. Order and discipline
3. High expectations for students
4. Teacher efficacy
5. Rewards and incentives for teachers and students
6. Positive (not remedial) school environments
7. Administrative leadership
8. Community support
9. Concentration on academic learning time
10. Frequent, monitored homework
11. Regular and frequent monitoring of student work
12. Well-coordinated curriculum (planned & integrated)
13. Variety of teaching strategies
14. Opportunities for student responsibility.

These attributes *describe* effective schools; they do not necessarily present a *prescription* for making any given school more effective. In other words, they are artifacts of effectiveness; things that are produced by effective schools, not necessarily the attributes that produce effectiveness.

Paper presented at the Middle School Invitational IV, Chicago, Illinois: National College of Education, November 9, 1983. *Copyright by the author, 1984.*

Merely adopting some of the criteria by which a school is judged to be excellent does not make it an excellent school. Something must be done to recreate enough of the culture that produced excellence to make it happen in another setting. But a serious question looms large, here. Can a school culture, which is obviously the product of many, many variables, be recreated in another setting? Can we actually produce in another school the culture that creates and nurtures excellence? Or can the cultures only evolve when the conditions are precisely correct, and undisturbed? If so, school improvement is an objective that must be left to the Fates.

Truth probably lies somewhere between these two extremes. The culture of the school is subject to some manipulation, but no culture is completely transportable from one setting to another. This means, of course, that school improvement plan A may not (in fact, probably will not) work in school B, and that "packaged" school improvement plans will fail.

How do you create the culture of the excellent school? Simply installing the 14 factors of effective schools probably won't do it because they are highly interactive—in other words, they stem simultaneously from a set of conditions and will not themselves make a good school.

Clearly, doing 1 (or 5 or 13) of these things will not guarantee an effective school. Some more fundamental conditions, of which these attributes are a part, need to be affected as well.

Secondary School Recognition Project

The U.S. Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Project sought those fundamental conditions and their manifestations in the very different school environments studied.

Using an approach unique to each state, the Chief State School Officers submitted five middle level nominees to the Department of Education. A 15-member panel composed of representatives from appropriate professional organizations and nationally recognized educators reviewed the nomination forms and selected the schools for site visits. Nearly 200 schools were thus identified.

Each of the selected schools was visited by site visitors selected by the Secretary of Education and the Chief State School Officers. These people were non-Federal experts who were knowledgeable about trends in education and who had qualitative research experience.

This paper is based on schools I visited in Ohio, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Indiana.

These schools represented a true mix: rural midwest, suburban, small-town deep South, inner city. In fact, the only generalization that can be drawn about them is that no demographic generalizations are possible.

Findings

Much research has focused on "school climate," a relatively nebulous concept that seems to include administrative style, physical setting, interpersonal relationships, group norms, community perception, and dozens of other variables.

Most often, the belief prevails that climate is essentially organizational. And while organizational climate is important, it covers only one cluster of the climate variables that constitute effectiveness.

By treating climate as a unitary concept, we have been relatively unsuccessful in developing ways to modify it. In fact, the popularity of "organizational climate" interventions is due, in part, to the fact that it is among the easiest to influence. A new policy, a new rule or governance structure, changes the organizational structure and, presumably, its climate quite a bit.

The most general definition of climate—and the one suitable for our purposes—is "any prevailing condition affecting life or activity." Important here are several points:

- It is a prevailing condition, not a random or freak occurrence
- It affects everything that happens in the "climate zone" to one degree or another
- It may be altered.

The four climates I observed in the schools I visited were:

- Physical
- Academic
- Social-Emotional
- Organizational

Clearly, these are not orthogonal; they interact to create a culture or complex milieu which, in turn, influences every activity of the school. Thus, it is not possible to rank them in terms of their importance to the academic program. The identification of these four serves only to help map the school's climates so that they are more easily described and influenced.

The specific features of these four climates are best explained by illustration and anecdote, for these are the reports that capture the human dimensions of the school. And the scenes also show the enormously complex chemistry of an effective school—one that manifests the 14 indicators listed earlier.

Physical Climate

Physical climate is probably the least important of the four. However, important physical features can be replicated in every building despite its age, location, or facilities.

The schools I visited ranged in age from 2 to 93 years. They had both open-space and traditional classroom designs; some were built as high schools and abandoned to the middle level grades when a new high school was built, others were built as junior highs or middle schools.

One of the buildings had a third floor that was condemned; one had won an architectural award for handicapped access. Some were badly overcrowded, others had barely enough students in them to fill the corridors during class changes. At first glance, they had almost nothing in common.

Upon closer inspection, however, some common elements emerged. Some of these may appear trivial, but they are, nevertheless, remarkable for their presence in every one of the effective schools I visited:

- The schools, despite their age, were well-lit and bright.
- The buildings were well-maintained; no plaster was loose, no broken tiles, broken lockers, or other damaged equipment were evident.
- The buildings were uniformly clean.
- There were no grafitti in or on any of the schools.

It would have been easy for the school to clean up before my visit, so my interviews directed some atten-

tion to physical facilities. Most interesting, though, was a common response to a question about academics. When I asked students "How do you know the school cares about you and your learning?" I was often told that the cleanliness of the school suggested to the students that the school staff thought enough of them to give them reasonable "working conditions."

One feature became a symbol of the entire physical climate: light bulbs. I never saw a burned out light bulb. I even asked people what they would do if they saw a light bulb that wasn't working and I was told, by students and teachers alike, that they would "get the custodian to replace it."

That suggests several important things: burned out light bulbs were infrequent enough to command attention; people thought they could do something about it so they did; their efforts were rewarded almost instantaneously.

I saw students tending the school as if it were "theirs." Clearly they thought it was. In some places, specific attention was given to cultivating student responsibility for the care of the building.

The conclusion is clear. Given good facilities and the expectation that maintaining them is a community effort, the school's environment is enhanced considerably. If students (and teachers) believe that their efforts will be overpowered by neglect from school officials, they have no reason to invest much attention in caring for the premises.

Academic Climate

The academic climate of these schools was characterized by five features. Each is described in detail below.

People in the schools talk about academics. Not only does academic conversation fill classtime, it is also the focus for much of the school's social interaction. Students often leave class talking about a puzzling (not confusing) problem the teacher has left them with; they discuss a demonstration they have seen; they talk about a film they saw in English class. In short, the academic topics and questions are of a nature that encourages conversation.

Further, adults often ask students about their academic performance. It was not uncommon to hear a math teacher ask a student how he did on an English paper, or for a coach to talk with a student about the computer program the student was struggling with earlier in the week. The message seemed to be that academics were important because people talked about them when they didn't have to.

Finally, adults (and I emphasize adults here, not just teachers) often asked students to help them with a problem that required an academic solution.

> . . . no culture is completely transportable from one setting to another.

A cafeteria worker asked a student to help write a computer program that would inventory cafeteria stock; an English teacher asked students to help her write a comforting letter to her 13-year-old nephew in another city who was heartbroken over being rejected by a girl he admired; the P.E. teacher asked students to help design and build a "golf course" that would serve the gym classes in their unit on golf.

Social interactions, conversations, and independent teacher-student contacts were arranged around academic skills that were needed to solve real problems in the school. It reinforced the connection between school and life.

Academic achievements are recognized and rewarded. This feature was pronounced in every school I visited. Not only were achievements rewarded, the rewards were given liberally and they were as prestigious as other awards given by the school. In other words, they compared favorably with athletic and other non-academic awards.

In every school, student work was displayed publicly. And it wasn't just art work. Shop projects, English essays, science projects, computer programs, math papers, musical instruments built by students, photographs of physical activity all adorned the walls of the school. Most important, it changed frequently—it didn't go up in September and come down in June. That way, there is always something new to catch your attention, and the recognition is genuine and recurrent.

In the most creative recognition I have seen, students are awarded "varsity letters" for special performance (academic or otherwise).

In this school I was met at the door by a student confined to a wheelchair who asked if I wanted to see his varsity letters. On the inside of his locker door were four small chenille letters—one for designing the lighting for a stage production, one for writing a computer program that allows teachers to put their grades into the midterm reporting system, and two more for similar activities.

Later, I found out that he would have received an identical reward for being the captain of the baseball team or running the low hurdles in record time. In this school, they recognized achievement of all kinds, and academic achievement is among the most valued of all.

> Merely adopting some of the criteria by which a school is judged to be excellent does not make it an excellent school.

Academics form the basis for leisure pursuits. The very best schools provide students with the opportunity to socialize around academic pursuits.

Special attention is given to academic interests in the formation of cocurricular activities: rocket clubs, computer clubs, botany clubs, poetry publications, astronomy groups, math teams, history fact contests . . . the list is endless. Most of these meet, if only briefly, during the regular school day so that students who have transportation problems can participate.

In one remarkable innovation, students were taken on an afterschool field trip—to a field. There, they were shown how to find different kinds of life, and, in a special touch, how to explain it to younger brothers, sisters, or babysitting clients.

In the same vein, one club focused on child development and babysitting skills. That, of course, provided the chance for students to talk about their own development and some of the puzzling aspects of it.

Most important, these activities were designed to socialize, to show that academic pursuits are not lonely (as is so often the case in class). To this end, they deemphasized individual competition; instead, they focused on team competitions or cooperative projects.

In short, these projects capitalized on the natural inclinations of the young adolescent to be a social creature who requires interaction with peers and adults in order to learn new skills and roles. These schools combined that developmental inclination with the academic program for a very productive marriage indeed.

Expectations are high but reasonable, and failure is tolerated. One art teacher showed me a shelf full of unfinished projects—the results of students attempting to complete tasks that were beyond their capacity. She could have discouraged the plans at the outset, or she could have made the students stick with it until they were finished. But if she did, she would have "taught them to hate art, me, the school and to always set their sights lower than they know they can achieve."

The rule is simple: if you get into a project and realize you can't finish it, it goes on the shelf and it belongs to anyone who wants to finish it or turn it into something else. For the teachers in these good schools, what was learned about the subject from the way it was taught was as important as the content that was conveyed.

Students were not asked to do things the teacher knew they couldn't do . . . and if the teacher wasn't sure, the student was asked to demonstrate a skill without an audience. In one P.E. class, students with little upper body strength were not asked to climb the rope, other activities were provided. And if a student who wasn't sure he or she could do it wanted to try, it was done without an audience—and practiced without peer criticism.

In the best schools, student told me that they were given things to do that were difficult, but not impossible. They didn't feel that they were doomed to fail at a task from the outset.

Teachers use time wisely. In the very best schools, teachers provide for maximum engaged learning time. Drill, when necessary, is brief and repeated. The objective is not just for the students to be busy, but for them to be busy at a task that: is intrinsically interesting, requires active cognitive engagement, and is at a level that will benefit the student. A student gains little from spending 40 minutes captivated by a contest or computer game that is of no benefit in advancing his or her skill development or academic performance.

To these ends, teachers manage time carefully. They plan their classes in 15-minute blocks to accommodate the varied attention spans of the young adolescent. They organize routines so that they do not have to be interrupted to give permission for a trip to the bathroom. They minimize classroom disruptions by overlapping activities and making each one logically connected to the next.

Throughout the school, the emphasis is on using time wisely. Interruptions are controlled, and students are shown that time is important through the example of teachers and administrators.

While time is used to maximum advantage, it is not filled with meaningless tasks designed only to maintain control. Much of the time in class is spent on group tasks, discussion, and interaction. Little time is spent on seatwork, and even less is devoted to meaningless drill on subjects a student has already mastered.

Most important, students are engaged at an appropriate level. Advanced students are not subjected to

endless repetition (the euphemism is "review") of concepts and skills they had already mastered, and slower students do not suffer the frustration of working on material they do not have the prerequisites to master.

In some schools studied outside of this project, as little as 12-20 percent of class time is used for the presentation of new concepts and information—a phenomenon more common in mathematics than in any other subject. *A Nation At Risk* concluded that 80 percent of the material in some books used by students is familiar to most of the students in the class.

Time is a precious commodity in these schools, and it is not wasted. Most important, simply filling time with activity is not considered a good use of it unless the activity engages students in significant intellectual performance at a level that benefits them.

Organizational Climate

Four characteristics of organizational climate were especially evident in these schools.

These schools have few rules, but those that exist are clear and, on their face, reasonable. Two elements of this feature are particularly important. First, there are not very many rules, so all can be remembered and applied by everyone in the school. This also means that the rules are general guides to behavior rather than specific prohibitions or directions.

In other words, rather than "no hitting," one is more likely to encounter a rule such as "Treat others thoughtfully and so that their welfare, safety, and opportunity to learn are not jeopardized."

Time is spent in each class interpreting that rule for the specific situations encountered in that class setting (an industrial arts class, for example, might have very specific safety rules), but there are few schoolwide rules, most are stated as positive guides to behavior, and everyone agrees upon them.

Of special important to the number of rules in a school is the students' feeling of control and power. If they believe they can know the rules and remember them, they (in their own words) believe that they can abide by them.

Long lists of rules are dysfunctional on two counts: they produce legalistic thinking (e.g., "If there's no rule against it, it must be O.K."), and they guarantee that students will break rules, often unknowingly. In fact, it is likely to become something of a game—how many rules must you break before you get in trouble?

Rules must also be reasonable. Students will generally conform to rules that have a clear purpose and are connected to their welfare or the welfare of the school. It is when school officials simply announce new rules without any explanation or convincing rationale that students rebel.

This requires, of course, that everyone perceive the problem or situation that a new rule is designed to correct, and that time be spent in class discussing the reasons for rules and the necessity for conforming to them.

Students should not make school rules; in fact, that's probably not a productive idea in many school environments. Students should, however, be involved somehow in the problem-solving process that leads to the formation of a new rule: consultation with student council, homeroom, or group advisory class meetings, informal meetings with school officials, and so on. Once people understand the problem, solutions, whether they are rules or some other manifestation of group consensus, seem more reasonable.

Related to reasonableness is fairness. Students expect to be treated fairly by adults, and nothing breeds resentment more quickly than perceived unfairness.

Fairness has two important elements: equity and judgment. Equity demands that students be treated reasonably *given the circumstances and conditions of their behavior.* Equity does not mean equal. For example, it is not "fair" to require a student who suffers from chronic kidney infections to adhere to the same rest room schedule as you might expect of other students.

Judgment demands that students be treated differently. It also demands that teachers understand the situation under which the behavior occurred.

As Alfred Arth has said, good middle school teachers tend to respond to disciplinary scenarios by asking for more information than their elementary or secondary peers. That's important; the old "you broke rule 25, that calls for punishment 18" approach isn't evident in the effective schools I visited. In these schools, teachers try to understand conditions of behavior and exercise reasonable judgment about it.

Student council has a dual role in effective schools. The student government organization in these effective schools performs two distinct and not entirely related functions.

First, it influences school policy and practice in an *advisory* fashion. Principals and faculty meet with the council to discuss schoolwide issues and problems. The council advises the school officials, discusses likely student reactions to proposed school changes, and tries to affect the final outcome through persuasive measures.

Second, the council performs as a service club for the school. It undertakes projects that improve the quality of life in the school and secure opportunities for student participation in school events.

Interestingly, it is the service function that seems to earn the council credibility among the students. If they are seen as contributing to the life of the school, they are also perceived as having influence on school policy. It is the quality of school life that most students are concerned about. If the council affects it, members are seen as doing their job. More esoteric policy decisions appear to be of little concern to most students.

The style of influence is not legislative in these good schools. Councils act much more like lobby groups than like legislatures. Little use is made of political power blocks and the like, and few issues that concern school policy reach a "vote."

More often, their influence, which may be considerable, is achieved in informal conversation and consultative problem-solving sessions with the principal. "What are we going to do about . . . ?" dominates the discussion.

Students know how to influence school policy and believe that they can. An important feature of these effective schools is the students' *belief* that the school is responsive to their concerns and their feelings. They believe that they can make things happen, that the school officials will listen to them, and that the system operates in their best interests.

That doesn't mean that they are entirely happy with everything that transpires in school, but they do believe that on really important issues they will be heard and their opinions will be considered, even if the final decision doesn't go "their way."

How do they make their opinions and feelings known? Students rely on informal mechanisms and procedures. They talk to teachers first. Most could name a teacher whom they would see to discuss their concern, confident that the teacher would see to it that their issue reached the proper powers.

Many students, a gratifying number in each building, also felt confident that they could "go right to the top" with a concern or problem—to the principal. All of the students who suggested this said that the principal would certainly listen to their concern and probably have a way of resolving the problem. A number of students cited examples of ways they felt that they had influenced school policy or practice by going for a talk with the principal.

Students also knew that some things simply were not going to change because they were matters of state law, district policy, or parental desire. Students knew what those items were and why they were not open for discussion. In short, the entire system tried to remove vestiges of arbitrariness and unreasonableness.

Teachers make major decisions. In the most effective schools, teachers are given major responsibilities for making important decisions about curriculum, students, special events, and even finances. In most cases, there is a formal mechanism for their participation in these decisions: an elected building council, a council of department heads, a council of team leaders, etc.

One of the outstanding features of these schools is that teachers often make major decisions about how the day is to be scheduled and how they are to make use of their instructional time.

In team-teaching settings, the teachers are often given 120 students, a time to start, a time to stop, and a time to go to lunch. The rest of the decisions about how to group students or divide up the day are left to them. In other words, they are treated as professionals who know how much "treatment" their clients need.

Curriculum decisions, from daily plans to building level revisions, are generally made by teachers, under the careful leadership of the principal. If the principal believes that curriculum planning is important, it happens.

In most cases, curriculum work is the responsibility of committees, but it is always subjected to careful scrutiny by and approval of the faculty. Most important, the decision to revise the curriculum, select new materials, and engage in planning is usually initiated within the building. Sometimes it originates from the faculty; just as often it is prompted by the principal.

Finally, teachers participate in decisions about how discretionary money is to be spent. Usually, this participation is through an elected or appointed council, but the opportunities for input are clear.

Participation is not limited to the submission of budget requests that are then accepted or rejected. Goals, priorities for expenditures, getting the most benefit for the money spent, and achieving curricular equity are discussed. Only then are final decisions made about how much goes where for how long.

Social-Emotional Climate

The social-emotional climate of the effective schools I visited was in some ways the most striking and in others the most difficult to detect. Clearly, though, this climate has a profound effect on the school, the academic quality of its programs, and the effectiveness with which students and teachers perform.

Described here are social-emotional climate variables common to the schools visited in the study.

The schools are encouraging, welcoming, supporting places. Interactions among students and between students and teachers are encouraged. Not only do teachers make themselves available to students, they

engage the students in conversations. The effect of this is dramatic. Visitors are made to feel welcome in the building, parents are encouraged to come to the school and are welcomed when they do. In short, human interaction is encouraged, expected, and rewarded.

Just as important, time is provided for interaction. Students have breaks (as do teachers) and conversation is expected.

Students are encouraged when teachers see them perform at events not related to the formal academic program. Students told me how important it was for them to see teachers at plays, concerts, athletic events, and other events where they got to "show off."

An attitude prevails that people are essentially worthwhile, competent, and good. What may be more important, people believe that *others* see them as essentially competent and worthwhile. Teachers praise each other unabashedly, as they do their students. In turn, the students are quick to compliment each other and the school staff.

An attitude of caring in the school is almost palpable. When someone returns from a sick day, one teacher told me, everyone makes a point of asking how he or she is feeling and if he or she needs any help in getting caught up on missed work.

The schools are secure places. One of the most evident qualities of the social-emotional climate is that students feel safe in school—safe not only from physical harm but also from psychological and emotional harm and abuse.

Because the academic climate is designed to reduce frustration, there is little evidence of physical aggression, property damage, or hostility. Not only did I not observe any physical violence during any of my visits, my review of disciplinary records showed little evidence of the events that are all-too-common in many middle level schools: fighting, vandalism, and racial and ethnic hostility.

The sense of security is also derived from the absence of ridicule or embarrassment. Teachers do not purposely embarrass students (by making the weakest kid in class climb a rope in front of the whole group, or by having the poorest reader read aloud to the class, or by asking the boy whose voice changing to sing a solo); in fact, they are especially sensitive to the possibility of embarrassment and do not create situations in which it might occur.

Even more important, teachers recognize the need for group approval and immersion in the anonymity of the group from time to time. Their lessons and their interactions with students are designed so that students are not singled out for special attention by the group. There was much individual attention given by the teacher, but no effort was made to draw group attention to individual students unless the student desired it.

Another kind of security is provided by cognitive rehearsals of events that might be potentially distressing to a student. I heard one teacher counseling a student who was going to ask a very popular classmate to a party and was afraid of being refused. By thinking through the nature of the problem, the student was better able to deal with it and predict his own behavior.

What happens in a secure environment? Students contribute to it as well. I saw almost no "capping" or ridicule of students by their peers, very little exclusionary behavior, and no physical hostility at all. Evidently, students in a low anxiety environment will try to keep it that way.

Climates affect the quality of schooling. To think of "school climate" is probably to oversimplify a complex set of interactions, variables, and characteristics.

Effective schools anticipate student needs and fill them without fanfare. Students in these schools did not have to ask for help, they simply got it. In these schools, teachers, staff, and administrators are constantly alert to needs that required attention and attention was given.

The schools do not focus on what students can't do. There is little discussion in these schools of "diagnostic-prescriptive" instruction, a model that starts with the premise that something is wrong and needs to be fixed. The focus is on what students can do, not on the things they can't do.

That doesn't mean that student skill deficiencies are not dealt with. On the contrary, they focus instruction on the individual in most cases. They communicated a "can-do" spirit . . . "You were able to do this, now take a shot at this."

The very best schools are trusting places. As mentioned earlier, teachers are trusted to make important decisions about students, curriculum, and life at the school. By the same token, students are trusted to make important decisions about their own learning. This takes several forms.

First, students are generally given significant choices about their learning. They are trusted to exercise some

control over how they cover their material and when they do it. In math, they might be given problems to choose from, or may be asked to make up their own problems to illustrate a new concept. In English, they might select a book that illustrates a topic under study and use it instead of the normally required material.

Second, students are given guidelines by which to evaluate, monitor, and control their own behavior. In one school, music is played in the corridors while classes pass. The rule is "if you can't hear the music, you're being too loud." For the most part, students, having been given a standard, monitor their own behavior and control it quite well.

Third, emblems of trust are evident throughout the school. Libraries are not locked up, computer labs are left open, and in one spectacular (and I orginally thought, naive) example, cameras hang in the corridor so that students can take pictures of special events in their school lives.

Sometimes things get broken, sometimes things disappear, but the message is clear: "We trust you to act responsibly."

In most of the schools, the principals reported that their theft/damage losses were no higher when equipment was available than when it was locked up. One said, "locks only deter honest people. If someone really wants to rip us off, they will. Why punish everyone?" The principal who left cameras lying about pointed with pride at a four-year-old purchase order which showed that four cameras were purchased and listed their serial numbers—the same serial numbers of the cameras that are hanging in the corridor now.

Behavior is treated in context. Stereotypes are nonexistent, and personalities and family backgrounds are not given much credence as explanations for why children did what they did. That doesn't reveal lack of concern or awareness; what it shows is that students were given a chance to act responsibly, and when they failed, it was treated as a single event, not "evidence" of the way Blacks, or Hispanics, or Appalachians, or poor people, or children from single parent homes act.

Each lapse of responsible behavior is treated as a learning exercise. Students are asked to critique what they did, understand why it was inappropriate, and suggest what they could do in a similar situation the next time. No one believed for a moment that "He did that because his father drinks. . ." or "because he couldn't help it."

Finally, these schools are civil places. It stands to reason that a school that emphasizes excellence, rewards achievement, and puts students to work on intellectual tasks that are appropriate for their development is a low-stress environment. As a result, people in the schools are relaxed, friendly, and happy. That produces a kind of civility that is becoming increasingly rare in our fast-paced, high-stress culture.

Students notice it too. When I asked why students seemed to be so cordial to each other, I was told that they "don't get hassled by our teachers, so we don't have to hassle someone to feel better."

The assumption in these schools is that everyone is doing his or her best. To be less than civil is completely inappropriate, and absolutely unnecessary.

Teachers give more sophisticated reasons for this behavior. If you feel good about what you do, and you have evidence that others do also, you don't have to build up your esteem by lowering the self-esteem or group esteem of another person. An Arkansas teacher said, "When everyone can look good, you don't have to make someone look bad so you can look better."

A Concluding Note

Climates affect the quality of schooling. To think of "school climate" is probably to oversimplify a complex set of interactions, variables, and characteristics.

Equally clear is the fact that the characteristics so often associated with effective schools actually stem from the culture of that school; they are not the things that create that culture. Unfortunately, the cultural conditions described in this paper are much more difficult to influence than are the "14 Characteristics." However, it is also evident that they *can* be influenced, and, in fact, *must* be if a school is to be effective.

How can these conditions be influenced? I will venture one tentative conclusion. The creation of a school culture is more dependent upon the behavior of *adults* in the school than on characteristics of students, economic climates of the community in which the school is located, per pupil expenditure, physical facilities, or a host of other demographic-environmental variables.

That's good news. We *can* do something as professionals to make schools more effective. Now we must be sure that the things we do are the things that make schools effective—not just the things that make them *look* effective.

MARCH 1986

Common Denominators in Effective Middle Schools

By James P. Garvin

The Program

The purpose of this program was to call attention to a national group of unusually successful schools on the secondary level—both high schools and schools for early adolescents. In addition to acknowledging these schools, former Secretary Terrel Bell also proposed that a network of exemplary schools could serve as models for other schools and districts concerned about improvements. The program worked as follows:

- Chief State School Officers nominated schools for the national program according to procedures developed to suit their individual states.
- Nomination forms submitted to the national program were reviewed by two 18-member panels of educational leaders from around the country. (No federal officials served on the panels.)
- During the first meeting, finalists were assigned a two-day site visitor.
- Site visitors conducted interviews with students, teachers, parents and community groups, school support staff, and district administrators. Site visitors also observed instruction in all areas of the curriculum and inspected indoor and outdoor physical facilities. (No federal officials served as site visitors.)
- Along with original nomination forms, extensive written and verbal site visit reports were carefully examined.
- Recognized schools were recommended to Secretary Bell for national attention. These schools received a specially designed flag during a ceremony at the White House. Plaques were also presented at local ceremonies.

Statistical Review

In the 1983-84 program, of 261 middle level schools originally put into nomination, 88 received national recognition. A preliminary review of the information on the schools indicated the following:

Rural 12%
Urban 27%
Suburban 61%

Findings

The factors I've listed are unique because they were identified by the various constituent groups within these schools as critical to effectiveness. Listed are six common denominators identified in the effective middle level schools I visited.

1. A clearly defined and articulated mission

Both Ernest Boyer in his report, *High School*, and Milton Goldberg, Executive Director of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which sponsored the report *A Nation at Risk*, recommend that schools work to define their mission as basic to all else. In the effective schools I visited, mission was an item which had been carefully developed into a master plan that gave meaning, direction, and context to existing programs.

James P. Garvin, director of middle school education at Gordon College, Wenham, Mass., visited 22 middle level schools in New England as part of the Secondary Schools Recognition Program sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

These mission statements were developed by representatives of all groups that made up the school community—parents, students, teachers, administration, and support staff. These statements clearly defined the role of the school from an understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics.

Consequently, as I interviewed, I found that constituent groups were not only aware of the need for such a mission statement, but they could articulate it well. These people clearly understood the role of the school within the K-12 system, yet they knew the uniqueness of their work. They knew they were not to be an elementary school or a high school, but a transition from the former to the latter. This articulation was made clear beyond the middle level to other levels, leading to a clearer understanding systemwide of the function and objectives.

2. Effective leadership

This common denominator is recommended in almost every national report. The *Nation at Risk* report, although not a report on middle level education, clearly expresses that effective leadership is necessary to carry out the reforms mentioned in the report. They call it "responsible leadership" but fail to specify what it is. Ernest Boyer states emphatically that principals must become "instructional leaders," but once again the practitioner is left with a vague definition. The same holds true in the writings of John I. Goodlad, Mortimer Adler, and others. It became obvious to me and to those I interviewed that these schools were effective primarily because they had committed, informed, courageous, and dynamic leadership.

Contrary to the emphasis on curriculum specialization in most of the national reports, I found that effectiveness in these schools was closely linked to the commitment of the teacher to the total life of the student.

Beyond these objectives I asked for specific characteristics of the principals. These characteristics seemed to fall into three categories. First, the principals had human skills. They were approachable, interested more in people than in competencies from which a concentration on others was natural. These people were teacher-centered, freeing teachers to be student-centered, which resulted in masterful, creative ideas erupting into exciting programs.

These principals made it their business to know students by first names, to write "thank you" notes to students and staff, to be at after-school events, and to build up their school as a "nice place to be" through every public relations gimmick possible. They were accessible to parents, students, and staff whenever necessary.

Second, they had management skills. They knew how to make effective use of time by reorganizational techniques. They were willing to give over scheduling, grouping, and discipline to teachers, allowing more ownership in the operation of the school. They moved to teaming patterns, giving teachers opportunities to work with a common group of students and a common planning time from which to develop their skills in a collaborative effort.

In some cases teachers worked together on interdisciplinary teams, and in other cases, through projects worked out before or after school. Teams developed their own leadership, leaving the principal to operate in a facilitator role. These principals appeared to be able to keep in mind their own ideas long enough to determine how to include the input of the gifts and skills of their staff.

Third, these principals had technical skills, they were informed about curriculum, organization, evaluation, support programs, personnel work, policies, and most important, the unique characteristics of the early adolescent. They were competent educators, well read, up-to-date with current research, involved on professional committees, and eager to examine ways to improve their school. There was no doubt in my mind and in the minds of the groups I interviewed that leadership was the key to their effective schools.

3. Student-centered teachers

Contrary to the emphasis on curriculum specialization in most of the national reports, I found that effectiveness in these schools was closely linked to the commitment of the teacher to the total life of the student.

These teachers were more concerned about encouraging students to understand "how" to learn rather than "what" to learn. They used higher order questioning skills, encouraging students to discover rather than to be told answers. Subject content was used as a vehicle to teach skills for continuous learning in life. Teachers knew about the unique problems of teaching this age group and demonstrated clear instruction to identified cognitive levels. Teachers were often scheduled into adviser/advisee sessions or were assigned to a home-base guidance function.

Many of the teachers I saw were involved in courses designed to develop high-interest activities for students and to provide more opportunities for guidance work. All of these activities clearly allowed teachers opportunities to mix with students in a relaxed, non-evaluative atmosphere from which to ascertain the students' learning needs.

The result of these efforts was manifested in a climate which was safe, exciting, and highly motivational. Contrary to popular opinion and the inferences of the national reports, these student-centered programs did not lead to mediocrity, but rather to increased interest in school and better achievement scores on standardized tests.

4. Strong parent involvement

The national reports do not make specific recommendations regarding parent involvement in the life of a school. However, I found parent involvement crucial to school effectiveness!

The parent groups I interviewed were very involved in the life of the school. Some served on PTO groups whose undertakings included raising monies to support student and teacher activities; organizing professional experiences to better inform parents on educational issues; serving as conduits to other parents on school activities and issues; sponsoring teacher recognition activities; and providing assistance to faculty for special activities.

Parents told me how welcomed and comfortable they felt in their children's schools. They were satisfied with the progress reports on their children and the general communication from school to home. They were pleased with the accessibility of teachers and administrators when needed. I saw parents serving as aides in classrooms, in the library, in the office, and in special activities. I saw a parent who had volunteered to teach Russian three days a week to a group of 15 seventh graders.

The parent involvement in these schools brought a healthy home/school climate which threatened no one, but rather provided a stronger support base for programs in the school. Teachers and administrators told me that such parent involvement was basic to the success of the school.

5. Ongoing goal development and evaluation

Interestingly enough, the national reports in and of themselves are designed to cause schools to evaluate themselves and bring about the necessary reforms.

Each of the schools I visited had already done inservice work to read and discuss these reports in an attempt to improve their programs. Most of the schools were very disappointed that these reports did not reflect their middle grade levels. Nevertheless, I found that these schools were actively involved in the evaluation process. One principal told me that in this business no one stands still—either you're going forward or you're falling behind!

The parent involvement in these schools brought a healthy home/school climate which threatened no one, but rather provided a stronger support base for programs in the school. Teachers and administrators told me that such parent involvement was basic to the success of the school.

Another told me that his school reorganized four years ago and tried to live on the novelty of the new experience. Two years later they fell from the peak and slowly degenerated. He found that it was easier to start a new program than to sustain it, and that sustaining an effective school depends on constant evaluation and retooling. I found a healthy respect for one another as people and as professionals. Committees were in place—made up of faculty, administrators, and in some cases, students—to evaluate, refine, and implement programs. These committees represented such programs as curriculum, instruction, management and discipline, faculty morale, professional growth, faculty governance, student activities, and special events.

6. Quality of life

After completing all of my interviews, I was curious to see, through personal reflection and dialog with other site visitors, if I could put my finger on the most important single variable which might have the greatest effect on successful schooling in these middle level institutions.

My colleague, Dr. Howard Johnston (also a site visitor in the original program conducted in 1983), wrote a paper outlining his experiences. His thoughts helped me to better understand my own reflections. He concluded (and I thoroughly agree) that perhaps the single

most important variable responsible for the success of these schools is the high quality of the adults in them!

In every school I visited over the past two years, I was struck by the tone in the building that resulted from adults who truly cared about each other and were interested in each other's lives! In my interviews with different groups of students I asked, "What makes this such a good place to attend school?"

The majority of first responses was that teachers make the difference! "What makes a good teacher?" I probed. They responded by saying, "A person who is approachable, has a sense of humor, cares about students, is willing to stay after school and help, participates in student activities, and is encouraging."

These responses came from the "turn-around students" as well as the academically talented. This respect for the adults in these schools evolved from a concentrated effort by teachers to be student centered, and from a mutual respect between teachers, supported by teacher-centered leadership. The outcome was a community in which kids were happy, confident, productive, and proud of their schools.

Conclusion

My observations revealed additional findings which cannot be categorized as elements of the above common denominators, but which are nevertheless valuable to this study. I found a strong emphasis on applied and fine arts, which in some cases were integrated into the basic core subject.

Students averaged about two hours of homework a night but had time during the school day to work on it. Classes were exciting with a high level of activity. I saw very few classroom management problems. Rules were minimal and clearly displayed. Most of these schools used some form of the assertive discipline technique. Classrooms themselves were bright, highlighted by student work on display. The buildings were clean and well maintained inside and out.

Let me say in conclusion that not once in my visits did I find that effectiveness was related to increased curriculum, extended school days or school year, or additional foreign language courses, all of which were recommended by the *Nation at Risk* report. I did find a strong interest in computer instruction but some hesitation to add these courses at the expense of exploratory courses. Every school I visited had an established core of curriculum, which was not a revolutionary idea to these people.

As one reads the national reports, he/she should keep in mind that the recommendations are not necessarily based on effective schools but are, instead, recommendations for correcting ineffective schools. The findings of the Secondary Schools Recognition Program reveal factors that are responsible for effectiveness in identified exemplary schools. I find it interesting that these findings, at least on the middle grade level, do not often agree with those of the national reports.

Garvin's findings were reported in the Fall 1985 issue of The Principal's Center Newsletter, *published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

Site Visitor's Report on Effective Middle Schools

By William Kerewsky

One early morning in March, three dozen educators gathered in Washington to plan their upcoming travels. They were "site visitors," selected by the Department of Education to spend two days in each of the schools chosen for potential recognition as exemplary secondary schools.

William Kerewsky is director of middle schools for Howard County Public Schools, Ellicott City, Md.

One hundred thirty-three middle level schools were included in the group; all had been recommended to the federal program by their state education agencies.

As a site visitor, my task was to amplify the information that had already been submitted. I was not an evaluator; I was to honestly and accurately describe the schools I saw.

We planned to visit 133 schools in 48 states (none in Hawaii, unfortunately, or in New Jersey) during a 12-week period.

In June, we met again to exchange stories. We talked about midnight bus rides through northern Montana, and we heard of the anti-government rally in a small mid-western town that kept the site visitor from leaving her school. We told each other about the tiny planes that took us to remote districts and of the lightning that struck while one of us was winging across Alabama.

Mostly, though, we talked about the people we met, the places we saw, the excitement, the surprises, the disappointments, and the creativity.

Our goal was to present a program to the panelists that summarized our collective experience in middle level schools and that would give them an overview of the entire country in preparation for our meetings to share information about individual schools during the next two days.

Our discussion was organized around several topics and was summarized in a large group session that included all of the panelists and middle level site visitors.

Programs and Instruction

We were surprised, in general, to see developmental reading programs that were well-designed but poorly implemented. Although much energy went into the planning and philosophical rationale for these courses, the actual classroom experiences observed were often not relevant, stimulating, or motivational.

On the other hand, it was interesting that many schools demonstrate great interest in the development of study skills and encourage the teaching of good study habits across the curriculum. Teachers and administrators at the middle level found these skills to be a prime responsibility and a common curricular thread.

However, little other integration of curricular material in classroom teaching was apparent. Although many schools were planning interdisciplinary approaches, there was little evidence of real progress in making this an instructional reality.

We were pleased to see the extensive activity in staff development in all parts of the country. Teachers were aware of current instructional practices, and many systems demonstrated vigorous commitment to the idea of helping teachers and administrators become more efficient and effective.

Mainstreaming of students with special needs is common and appears to be working well in many schools. Teachers around the country accept "ownership" of all students in the school, and administrators appear to fully support the concept of providing youngsters with the least restrictive educational environments possible.

Many of the site visitors were dismayed to see a growing trend toward academic and athletic competition, even in those schools that had formerly discarded such activity for philosophical reasons. Although much of the recent academic competitiveness was inaugurated to counterbalance the interscholastic athletic programs in some areas, this solution seemed to many of us to exacerbate rather than to resolve the problems.

Teachers and administrators at the middle level schools we visited openly cared about the youngsters for whom they were responsible. Unabashedly child-centered, they spoke easily about their love for the students and their understanding of early adolescents' needs.

Traditional seating patterns and instructional patterns, with a heavy emphasis on dittoes and worksheets, were common. Even in open-space schools with team-teaching arrangements, instructional technique was often no different from that in the self-contained, disciplinary classrooms of the 1950s.

Teachers and Administrators

At a time of widespread publicity about teachers' contracts, "burnout," and militancy, we were excited to see that faculty members in the schools we visited were enthusiastic about their profession. They laughed about the enormous expectations placed on them, but did not seem to believe that they were exploited or under-appreciated.

Teachers devoted extensive amounts of time to their schools and students; their efforts went far beyond anything negotiated in their contracts. Almost universally, they took their lead from their school administrators who were also dynamic, creative, personally committed, and hard-working.

Teachers and administrators at the middle level schools we visited openly cared about the youngsters for whom they were responsible. Unabashedly child-centered, they spoke easily about their love for the students and their understanding of early adolescents' needs.

Site visitors expected and found regional differences in the personal characteristics of school administrators, but were still struck by the general dearth of female administrators, the lack of minority leadership, and—in some schools—the great imbalance of male and female teachers.

Teachers and administrators at these selected schools came from a broad spectrum of training backgrounds. Although varying state certification requirements had some impact, site visitors noted a general trend toward mixing elementary and secondary-trained instructional staff.

Principals were just as varied. In most schools, they had a commitment to working at the middle level and an almost defiant stance that "we choose to work here." People were proud of their status as middle level educators and expressed little desire to work elsewhere in their school systems.

"Middle school philosophy" is endorsed and is a frequent point of reference in pedagogical discussions at these schools. Community and financial realities, however, are also recognized, so stances have been modified—without apology—to ensure survival of the major, student-centered mission of the schools.

In many cases, the pragmatic necessity for staff and administration to modify the philosophy in order to maintain school support in its political context helped keep issues alive and forced constant reassessment of values.

Staff members in these schools constantly referred to themselves as a family, and talked about the joy of interacting with each other and with students. They felt like they were part of a mutually supportive, winning resource team for their youngsters, and often praised each other, the students, the community, and especially the administrators.

Staff members in these schools constantly referred to themselves as a family, and talked about the joy of interacting with each other and with students. They felt like they were part of a mutually supportive, winning resource team for their youngsters, and often praised each other, the students, the community, and especially the administrators.

The schools are not trouble-free, however. Staff and administrators are concerned about salaries and working conditions. Teachers agonize about the expectation that they can provide all things to all students—especially in some buildings that are old and inadequate—and they often have to face overwhelming family and community demands. In most of the schools visited, however, these factors were seen as part of the whole package rather than as impossible impediments to goal attainment.

Influence of Reform Movements

The schools visited were dynamic and appeared to be in the process of transition. The site visitors believed much of this transition was due to natural evolution, but some was in response to national and state reform movements. The site visitors were impressed with the energy being devoted to change but did not believe that all of the results were positive ones for early adolescents.

Positive effects frequently observed included:

1. Increased emphasis on academic excellence
2. An awareness that students should focus on their tasks
3. A productive, analytical use of test scores
4. Clearly stated daily classroom objectives
5. Increased awareness of the need to incorporate higher order thinking skills into the curriculum
6. Increasing use of media centers as a focal point of student research and access to information
7. Clear articulation between all levels of schooling
8. Increasing emphasis on skill acquisition
9. Attention to "high risk" students
10. Time and funds allotted to staff development
11. Grouping of students for appropriate instruction.

The site visitors also noted some potentially negative changes at the middle level that are attributed to administrative perceptions of "reform" requirements:

1. Tracking of students, particularly those from lower socioeconomic levels, resulting from rigid ability grouping. In some schools, there is little flexibility and little review of instructional grouping practices.

2. Teacher frustration due to an awareness that their instruction needs to be studied and changed but that

the process is complicated by a lack of time, funds, or direction.

3. Public demand for merit pay and career ladders based on teacher evaluation, but no clear agreement about the results can reasonably be expected.

4. State-mandated curriculum changes that are a reaction to legislated directives but that do not take into consideration the affective or developmental needs of youngsters.

5. Increasing awareness by less successful youngsters that they may not be able to achieve at the levels now being required by state authorities, possibly leading to lowered self-esteem and higher drop-out rates.

Leadership

Usually, the school leadership was clearly invested in the principal. However, in some extremely successful schools, leadership involved a partnership with assistant principals and guidance staff. Individual teachers or teaching teams have assumed a much greater role in school decision making than is traditionally expected in some cases.

Parent involvement in decision making, including the selection of staff members in some smaller districts, was noted and appreciated by teachers. Where there are clear guidelines, and where the expectations for parental involvement are explicitly stated, this was considered a very positive aspect of school-community partnership.

In the exemplary schools where the principal was clearly the administrative leader, most of the following characteristics were observed:

- The principal had positive attitudes toward the staff, the students, and the tasks at hand. Although the problems and political realities facing the schools were acknowledged, the principal accepted these as challenges rather than as obstacles or excuses.
- The principal was dynamic and assertive. Even though personal style might be low-key, all staff members were aware of the principal's goals and expectations and the administrative "presence" was obvious throughout the school.
- The administrator was responsive and spent much time communicating with parents, teachers, and students. He or she wrote notes frequently to congratulate and reinforce positive behavior. Most of the site visitors were astounded by the high volume of personal written communication generated by successful principals.
- The principal knew how to "wheel and deal," using all possible state, local, and federal sources to obtain support for programs. These administrators seemed to enjoy the creative problem solving involved in garnering funds and political backing for their school.
- The successful principal in an exemplary school was seen as a role model by both staff and parents, highly regarded as a leader and as a caring, humane adult.

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The Schools Making Progress Toward Excellence

After the travel, the discussions, the long reports, and the fanfare, site visitors were left with certain vivid images of those schools that were regarded as models for the nation. A dozen characteristics marked these outstanding places as special places in which young adolescent learners could be educated happily and effectively:

1. The entire building had an up-beat, positive atmosphere.

2. Teachers, administrators, and parents had high expectations for the academic and social success of the youngsters and communicated these frequently.

3. Everyone in the school, including custodial workers, office staff, professionals, students, and parents voiced pride in the school and expressed a personal involvement in its excellence.

4. The building was clean and well kept, regardless of its age.

5. The school people saw their primary task as the instruction of youngsters in academic and practical subjects.

6. Time in class was spent on task, not in administrative or disciplinary matters.
7. Parents were involved, knowledgeable, and supportive.
8. The school classrooms, hallways, and playing fields demonstrated order, organization, and effective discipline.
9. The school and its supporters made certain that the image that was presented to the public was a positive one, reflecting demonstrable success in meeting the needs of the students and the expectations of the community.
10. Affective domain education was seen as a responsibility of all adults associated with the school. In many places, teachers took an important role in this process through a highly structured advisory program.
11. Teachers and parents agreed that students need to learn efficient organizational and study skills and be responsible for completion of school assignments.
12. The schools were caring places, staffed with well-trained, student-oriented adults who wanted to work with early adolescent youngsters in a mutually supportive partnership with parents and the community.

In the final analysis, these attributes marked the success of schools dedicated to the education of middle level children.

All of the site visitors contributed to this report. Special thanks go to my colleague, Cheryl Chase, for her diligence and good humor in helping organize the remarks of many observers.

APRIL 1990

Middle Level School Grades and Program Development

By Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.

The term "middle level education" is most frequently used to describe schools and programs that involve combinations of grades 5 through 9 for youngsters between 10 and 14 years of age. Local districts must identify which grade configuration will allow them to develop the most effective middle level school program, keeping in mind that a school consists of programs, not grades.

The grade configuration should also take into account the ages during which youngsters in the community begin to show the characteristics of early adolescence.

Maturational Concerns

Because the chronological age at which pubescence occurs has declined by approximately four months per decade since 1900, more of the characteristics formerly experienced during the ages of 14 to 18 years are now evident in the early adolescent. Young adolescents today are also more socially aware and sophisticated than their agemates of a decade ago. However, in most cases their social-emotional maturity has not increased.

Growing numbers of elementary education authorities concur that the maturity of today's 6th graders—and even some advanced 5th graders—can be a negative influence on the younger children in elementary schools. In addition, the majority of 9th graders now have more in common developmentally with high school students than with younger middle level school students.

The Vanishing Adolescent (Friedenberg, 1959) forecast that in today's context, youngsters would need more, rather than less, positive interaction with adults during early adolescence. Building on childhood experiences, the physical, emotional, and social metamorphosis of early adolescence capstones the character, ethics, and citizenship skills of adults.

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Grades-in-School Concerns

Grade 6-8 schools are the fastest growing school organization in our nation, while the number of grade 7-9 schools continues to decline. Presently there are more grade 6-8 middle level schools in the United States than grade 7-8 schools, grade 7-9 schools, or grade 5-8 schools. However, districts must identify which "grades-in-school" pattern will best accommodate local student developmental needs. No single group of grades can adequately serve every district's middle level educational requirements.

The nature of the middle level and high school environments varies substantially when grades in the schools are changed.

For example, in a reorganized grade 9-12 high school, two grades (9 and 10) will be entering during its first year. Its student population will then be one-fourth younger than when it was a grade 10-12 school. High school students are usually considered sufficiently mature to adjust to a high school regimen by themselves. Unfortunately, little, if anything, is usually done to help students adjust to an earlier move into high school.

When a middle level school shifts from a grade 7-9 to grade 6-8 organization, two-thirds (both grades 6 and 7) of the student body will be new to the middle school in its first year of operation. Thereafter, the middle school population will be one-third younger than was the case in the grade 7-9 school. This is exacerbated if a district shifts from grade 7-9 to grade 5-8 middle level schools.

Deciding whether a grade 5-8, 6-8, or 7-9 unit is most effective in the districtwide organizational structure requires local decisions on two issues.

First, educators must identify the age at which local students demonstrate their maturity and readiness to move out of the elementary school environment and program. If it is judged that 6th graders will be better served developmentally by moving into a middle level school structure and program, the issue is clear. Similar readiness of 5th graders should be confirmed before reorganizing into a grade 5-8 configuration.

Difficulties develop when districts quickly decide to extend effective grade 6-8 programs to include grade 5. Adding 5th grade to existing grade 6-8 schools considerably increases the span of developmental maturity in that school's environment. Does maturation among local 5th graders make their placement more appropriate in a grade K-5 or 5-8 setting? Student readiness for the instructional and organizational environment of the middle level setting must be specified.

Needs of developmentally precocious 5th graders are usually best served in moving them to the middle level school. A reorganized K-4 program becomes more child-centered if the behaviors of 5th graders are sufficiently advanced as to conflict with developmentally younger children. There is usually more concern about what 2nd graders face in dealing with street-wise 5th or 6th graders than about how 5th and 6th graders deal with 7th and 8th grade students.

Slower maturing 5th and 6th graders must understand and adjust to the more mature level they are approaching. They and their more precocious agemates must understand that the wide range and extremes of physical growth and development individuals may experience at this time is normal.

As students understand this diversity, they should become less anxious about their own developmental rates. They should also learn to be more accepting of peers who are at different developmental stages (Beane and Lipka; 1986, 1987).

Second, educators must identify how to deal adequately with school building and classroom space needs. In some districts the community either cannot or will not finance new school buildings. This can force the movement of grades 5 to the middle level school building(s) to alleviate elementary school crowding.

What if 5th graders are not yet ready for the developmental and instructional shifts in the middle level school program? Fifth graders require an elementary-oriented program well-suited to their developmental needs in an area separated from the other students. Different scheduling and hall passing times for grade 5 should also be considered. In that way, neither the developmental nor program needs of 5th graders will be frustrated. This will require adequate planning and financial underwriting.

Students should also be prepared in the terminal elementary school grade for their transition into the middle level school program the following year. Boards of education, parents, and professional staff members must consider this in reorganizing the grades in the district's school. Articulation of the elementary program with the reorganized middle level program requires planning between educators from both units.

Entering middle level school students spend much of their first year adjusting to organizational, instructional, and environmental changes from elementary school. The second year their learning is enhanced in a familiar setting and environment.

A special consideration is the two-grade school, which has a 50 percent turnover of the student body each year. Movement and adjustment to high school is more difficult for students from two-grade middle level schools because they have a less extended and more fragmented middle level educational experience than students in three-grade schools. Students in middle level schools with three or more grades gain additional educational experience in a known environment. Logistic and economic needs are the sole reason for two-grade middle level schools.

Multiple Schools and Programs in a Single Building

The effectiveness of a school's program resides in the degree to which it is based upon the developmental needs of the students served by that program. This is also affected by the school staff's awareness of the educational implications of the developmental level of the students.

When middle level and high school programs are housed in a single building, the former seldom receive parity of support. This is further exacerbated when separate faculty members and administrators are not provided for each program level. The focus of support systems, allocation and use of facilities, and emphasis on staff development usually favor the high school.

Grade 6-12 or 7-12 patterns frequently overlook the learning and developmental needs of students in the middle level grades. Teachers with both middle level and high school classes are seldom able to put their high school focus fully aside when teaching younger students, because it is difficult for teachers to "shift gears" and deal discretely with the different instructional needs of both populations.

Wherever possible, teachers should be given *either* high school *or* middle level teaching schedules. Ideally, teachers who must teach both middle level and high school sections should teach their middle level courses before their high school courses. It is easier for teachers to "shift up" to high school class focus after middle grades classes than the reverse. Where such scheduling is not possible, teachers have benefited from having a planning period after their last high school course and before their middle school sections.

Separating middle level and high school teaching loads can also be facilitated if individual teachers are certified in two content areas (e.g., English and social stud-

ies). The core curriculum model where those teachers offer both subjects to single classes of students during consecutive periods has also reduced split high school-middle grades teaching loads.

This is not to say that these conditions cannot be overcome. A grade 6-12 or 7-12 structure could be planned to provide:

- Separate faculty members for both the middle level and the high school programs and, if possible, an administrator primarily concerned with the middle level program
- Staff development needs based on separate needs of middle level and high school staff members
- Separate bell schedules to isolate high school students
- Division of the facility, with transition and bridging possible through planning and design
- Budget categories separated to ensure that the high school does not prey upon monies needed to develop and extend middle level school programs.

While possible, grade 6-12 or 7-12 school programs seldom deal adequately with these five concerns. Schools organized on this basis should provide a protective custody that respects early adolescent, maturing adolescent, and young adult educational needs in a single school setting. All too often such efforts merely combine and reduce administrative, curriculum, pupil personnel, and other supports.

School districts must define a local middle level educational identity based on early adolescent needs separate from those of high school learners. The needs of both programs housed in the middle level/senior high school can be specified. The parity of middle level educational needs in the building must not be sacrificed to high school program priorities.

Developing a grade 6-12 or 7-12 building that meets the educational needs of both the middle level and high school is also costly. The savings actually realized seldom justify loss of effective middle level and high school programs in separate settings.

In smaller communities, K-12, K-6, and 7-12 patterns persist out of necessity. K-8 schools do not serve middle level program needs as well as they do elementary school program needs. The number of middle level grades students in K-8 settings is usually too small to warrant the diverse program needed in middle level grades.

The recent Task Force Report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Hornbeck, 1989) indicates that properly planned, separate middle level schools best serve the developmental learning needs of their students.

Instructional Organization Issues

Krug (1950) stated that to be effective, curriculum planning and school program development must be a "continuous, cooperative, comprehensive process dealing with concrete issues." This is particularly true in today's information society if time and resources put into middle level school program reorganization are to achieve their desired results.

The success or failure of such changes ultimately depends on the degree of teacher involvement in determining such changes. Reorganization of middle level instructional patterns is most effective when teachers play a major role in planning those approaches.

Instructionally, middle level schools should be "teaming schools." Teaming should not necessarily be construed as team teaching; the teaming of teachers to plan and develop programs for those whom they commonly teach should be the initial concern. Such planning can define a solid foundation for real classroom "team" teaching rather than "turn" teaching.

Departmentally organized instruction separates learning within content areas. On the other hand, teaming can integrate learning among areas and reduce isolated learning of subject content.

Deciding how teaming in the middle level school's entry grade should differ from procedures in later grades must be determined.

For instance, two-teacher teams in the entry middle level school grade can ease the transition from the self-contained regimen of the elementary school. This may also better prepare students for extended team arrangements in later middle level grades. However, helping students adjust to changes in progressing through the middle level school also requires staff attention in team planning time.

For instance, one such approach begins with an introductory team program in 6th grade, followed by a 7th and 8th grade team experience continued during a two-year, 80-week cycle. This requires that 7th grade teams remain with their students through 7th and 8th grade. Following this two-year cycle, students move on to the high school while the teacher teams pick up new 7th graders for another two-year cycle.

In this way, students have a group of teachers who know and work with them for 80 rather than 40 weeks over two years. Young adolescent identity development is enhanced when classes and teaching teams move together through those two years. Teachers better understand the growth and development that young adolescents experience during that time.

Data (George, Spreul, and Moorefield, 1987) strongly recommend the extension of student-teacher relationships beyond one year. This writer (1982) described a procedure for organizing two-grade middle level schools in such a manner. Middle level school programs with sufficient numbers of students and staff might find this an attractive possibility.

Conclusion

Middle level schools must focus on local implications of the middle level school program organization. This must define program identity based upon what youngsters *can* do and achieve as they pass through their middle level school years. That identity must be separate

from both the elementary and high school and be articulated with the identities of both the elementary and the high school programs (Toepfer, 1986).

Developing a Mission Statement for the Middle Level School (Johnston, et al., 1987) can assist with that process. That mission must, of course, be grounded in the developmental levels of students in the local middle grade program.

Finally, let us remember that total educational effectiveness is best served when elementary, middle level, and high school programs are bridged. The advantages and disadvantages in the grade combinations included in each school level should be clearly identified. Grade configurations do affect the ability of middle level school programs to ease the transition from elementary to high school programs.

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SEPTEMBER 1989

Schools in the Middle: Progress 1968-1988

By William M. Alexander and C. Kenneth McEwin

A major development in American school organization and programs during the twentieth century has been the movement from a two-level elementary and secondary school organization to a three-level organization: elementary, middle, and high school.

The schools in the middle, variously introduced, reorganized, or renamed as "junior high schools," "middle schools," and "intermediate schools," link their feeder elementary schools to the high schools. Today, recognition of the great importance of education at this level is becoming increasingly common, especially with the impetus of the report of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents released in June 1989.

This report, Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, declares that: "Middle grade schools — junior high, intermediate and middle schools — are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescence."[1] Their eight major recommendations encompass the six criteria or earmarks we use to appraise today's schools. Our conclusions indicate that progress is being made, but far too slowly.

The first schools to come between elementary and high schools—junior high schools—had become very popular by 1960, when approximately four out of every five high school graduates had gone through a 6-3-3 (elementary-junior-senior high) school organization, reversing the 1920 statistic of four out of every five having gone through an 8-4 (elementary-high school) plan. By 1960, however, dissatisfaction with the three-level plan, specifically the junior high school, was evident in many areas. A search for alternatives resulted in a new "middle school" plan, usually consisting of grades 6-8 or 5-8, that spread rapidly.

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The Surveys: 1968 and 1988

William M. Alexander, under a Cooperative Research Grant from the U. S. Office of Education conducted a survey of middle schools in 1967-68 to provide benchmark data regarding the status of the new middle schools.[2] Only schools that had at least three grades and not more than five, and included grades 6 and 7 were surveyed. A 10 percent random sample of the 1,101 schools meeting these criteria was secured, with final data reported from 110 schools. Sections of the survey were replicated by other researchers in 1978[3] and 1981.[4] As the grades 6-8 middle school movement surpassed in number all other grade organizations (See Figure A), the authors decided that full replication of the 1968 survey after 20 years would provide useful benchmark data. The 1968 survey was replicated and expanded to include additional questions that would help identify likenesses and differences between the characteristic features (earmarks) of middle level schools in 1967-68 and 1987-88, and between schools of different grade organizations today.[5] Hereafter in this report the two surveys are referred to by the year in which they were concluded—1968 and 1988. The 1988 survey sample included:

- Middle schools as defined in the 1968 survey (schools having at least three grades and not more than five, and including grades 6 and 7)
- Schools with grades 7-8 only
- Schools with grades 7-9 only.

The latter two groups were added in the 1988 study because of the large number of schools they involved, and to compare middle level schools of different grade organizations. Reference to "middle schools" usually does not

include these latter two, but the terms "schools in the middle" and "middle level schools" are used to refer to all schools between elementary and secondary school levels.

Survey forms were mailed to 11 percent of each of the grade organization groups. A total of 670 (56 percent) were returned and used. Data were received from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In this report, major attention is given to middle schools as defined in the 1968 survey, since only these school organizations were included in both surveys. The last section, however, deals with the 1988 data on all schools in the middle, including those with grades 7-8 and grades 7-9.

Why a Middle-School?

The factors responsible for the establishment of the junior high school between 1910 and 1960, and of the middle school in the period thereafter, have been related elsewhere. [6] In general, the junior high school had been promoted by national education organizations and committees to improve secondary and later education, and the middle school grew up originally as an intended improvement over the earlier provisions for the age group (ages 10-14) in transition from elementary to high schools and from childhood to adolescence.

Comparisons of the relative frequency of reasons for the establishment of the new middle schools as checked by respondents (usually principals) in 1968 and 1988, indicate some refinement of rationale by 1988 toward greater emphasis on student needs and related program improvement in 1988. "To eliminate crowded conditions" was frequently checked in 1968, but had dropped to third place in 1988. "To provide a program specifically designed for children in this age group" was ranked first in 1988, second to the overcrowding factor in 1968.

Several other program-related reasons were more frequently given in 1988, including "more specialization for grades 5 and 6 students," "bridging elementary and high school," "remedying weaknesses of the junior high school," and "trying out innovations."

Certain administrative reasons were also important in the establishment of some new middle schools, and many good schools were first started without a clear devotion to the middle school goals and earmarks they later accepted and implemented.

Preparation for the New School

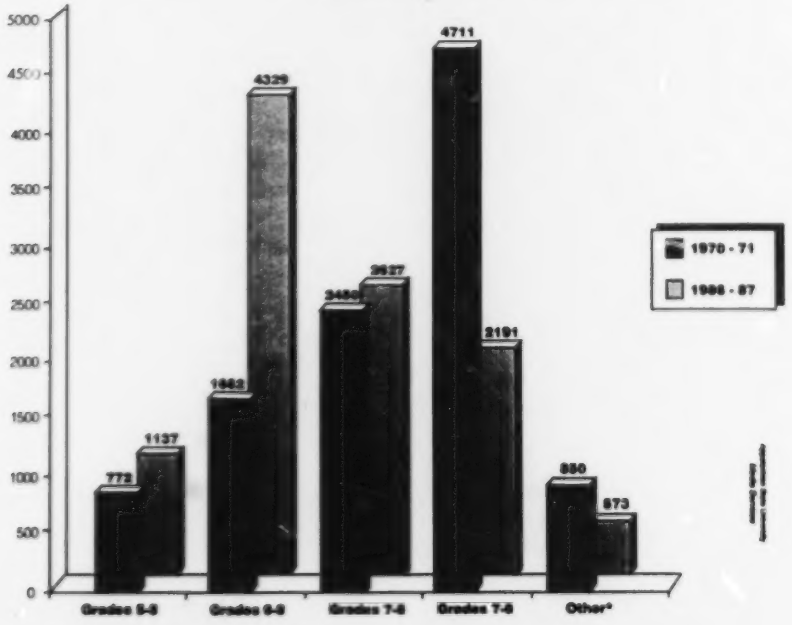
Probably most important is the evolution of the school once created. Later questions indicated much variation over the 20 years, but impressive numbers of schools did succeed in becoming "real" middle schools.

For the most part, the means of preparing for the new middle school organizations varied little in 1968 and 1988, but some differences should be noted:

- The percent of schools having provided for a year or more of faculty study and planning in the district more than doubled after 20 years.

Figure A

Number of Middle Level Schools With Various Grade Organizations, 1970-71 and 1986-87



*5th or higher, with the highest grade 7th to 9th

- The percent of schools being represented in a funded middle level project jumped from 3 to 16 percent.
- Similar increases occurred in preschool faculty workshops (5 to 27 percent) and school visitation (38 to 72 percent).

In both surveys "occasional planning sessions of prospective middle school faculty members" was the most common type of preparation, reported by more than half of the respondents, with the possibly critical input of new ideas through "visitation of schools having similar plans" and "inservice meetings with consultants" second and third respectively.

Several interesting preparatory activities were reported in the 1988 survey's open-ended blanks: "hiring the new middle school principal a full year in advance for planning/preparatory tasks"; "year of study by administration and board of education with faculty input"; "two years of intensive faculty preparation"; and "gradual institution of middle school reforms over five years with faculty involvement."

Comment

Clearly, the experience of the past 20 years has underlined the need for careful preparation of the community and school personnel for the new school. Middle level leaders have become more innovative and persistent as to methods of preparation, but more time, study, and planning are consistently needed and sought.

The Teacher Education Problem

The 1968 survey did not include a question about the preparation of teachers for the middle school. However, the concluding comment of the survey report was that: "Preservice and inservice education programs must be developed to provide an input of innovative programs and organizational practices, if the new organizations are to really differ from the old ones."

Data concerning the continuing teacher education problem are shown in Figure B. These data are not surprising in view of earlier findings that in 1981-82 only 30 percent of the teacher education institutions responding to a teacher education survey reported that they offered programs of middle level teacher education, and only 33 percent so reported in 1986-87. [7]

Certainly, adequate preparation for the conversion to three-level organizations does not yet include employment of enough specifically trained professional personnel, and therefore school districts must provide a variety of middle school inservice education opportunities. It is surprising that the middle school earmarks have been implemented as much as they have without more adequate training of middle school personnel.

Comment

Middle school representatives can help solve this problem by helping their teacher education institutions develop and improve preparation programs. They can also help by carefully checking on the preparation of teacher applicants as well as present faculty members, and offering useful inservice education to those lacking adequate preparation.

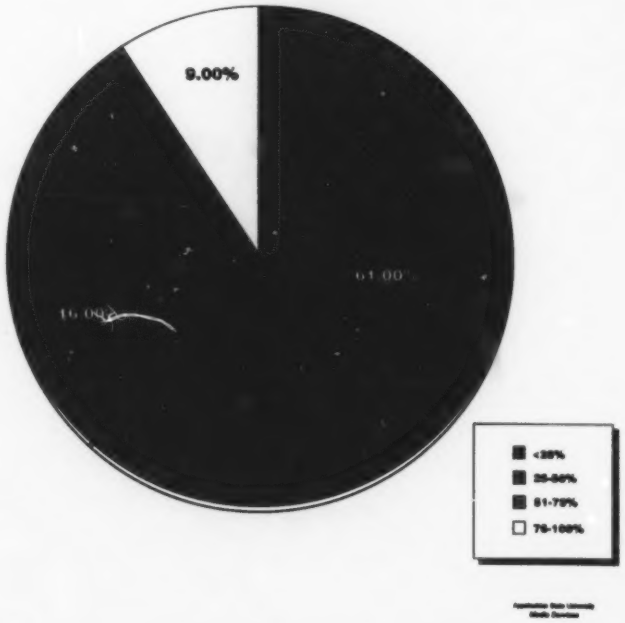
Earmarks of Good Middle Schools

The characteristics or earmarks generally considered as critical in achieving educational quality in middle schools are listed below. [8]

1. An interdisciplinary organization, with a flexibly scheduled day. Table 1 shows that the four-subject (language arts, math, science, and social studies) teaming is the characteristic type of interdisciplinary organization in these schools and that there has been considerable increase in the percent of schools using this organization in grades 5-8 from 1968 to 1988. Continuation of the traditional elementary school model—the self-contained

Figure B

Percents of Middle Level Schools Having Faculties With Various Extents of Special Middle Level Preparations, 1988



classroom, above grade 4 and 5—and adoption of the high school one—departmentalization—before grade 9, were undesirable features of the two-level organization dropped by many middle schools. Still, only about one-third of the middle schools reported the use of interdisciplinary organization in 1988.

Despite the progress in adopting interdisciplinary teaming, fewer schools had adopted flexible scheduling in 1988. The data were collected by grades in 1988 and cannot be easily compared with those for 1968, but 70 percent of schools in the 1968 survey reported the use of uniform daily periods. In 1988, this practice was used in grade 5 by 40 percent of the schools, in grade 6 by 67 percent, and in grades 7 and 8 by 82 percent. (See Table 2.) Hence, it is assumed that even some schools having an interdisciplinary organization may not be taking full advantage of its possibilities in combination with flexible scheduling to permit appropriate uses of time for varying purposes.

Comment

Middle level administrators may have difficulty implementing the interdisciplinary team organization and flexible scheduling, but those who have succeeded affirm the values of these organizational features. Teaching and learning can be easier and better with minimal barriers between subjects, classes, and periods.

TABLE 1
PERCENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS UTILIZING CERTAIN PLANS FOR ORGANIZING INSTRUCTION IN BASIC SUBJECTS, GRADES 5-8, 1968 AND 1988

Subject Area	Grade	Interdisciplinary		Departmental		Self-Contained	
		1968	1988	1968	1988	1968	1988
Language Arts	5	3	33	20	26	60	38
	6	8	40	35	44	30	18
	7	6	31	74	66	1	6
	8	6	26	74	71	1	6
Math	5	3	31	33	31	50	36
	6	8	37	50	48	24	16
	7	6	27	88	71	0	5
	8	6	23	89	75	0	4
Science	5	3	30	30	26	55	39
	6	7	36	50	47	26	16
	7	5	26	87	71	0	4
	8	6	22	87	76	0	5
Social Studies	5	3	29	28	27	60	27
	6	7	37	39	46	32	17
	7	5	28	80	68	1	4
	8	6	23	76	23	2	5

2. An adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan. The increase in the number of schools having full-time counselors, from 42 percent in 1968 to 78 percent in 1988, indicates progress in the total guidance program. Of particular interest is the advent of teacher guidance plans variously called "home base," "adviser-advisee," and "teacher advisory plans" so novel in 1968 that they were not included in the survey. In the 1988 survey, 39 percent of the schools said they had such a program. Of these schools, 77 percent had daily advisory periods with about two-thirds of the periods being more than 15 minutes in length.

TABLE 2
PERCENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS USING CERTAIN TYPES OF SCHEDULING FOR INSTRUCTION BY GRADES, 1988

Criteria	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Self-Contained Classroom	42	22	8	8
Daily Periods - Uniform	40	67	82	82
Flexible Scheduling Within Blocks for Teams	25	31	23	20
Daily Periods - Varying	19	14	11	11

Comment

Middle school principals and faculties should work closely with counselors to implement this important program. The largeness of schools, the complexities of society, and the unique developmental needs of early adolescents make continuing contact with one teacher/adviser an important, if not essential, feature of effective middle schools.

3. A full-scale exploratory program. Extensive data regarding their exploratory programs showed that the grades 5-8 and 6-8 middle schools continued the exploratory programs of the grades 7-9 junior highs, usually offering common exploratory subjects on a short-term, frequently rotating basis. Only one of the traditional exploratory subjects (see Table 3) became much less widely available from 1968 to 1988 in the middle schools—foreign language. Some subjects were less widely required, but more frequently elective, such as home economics and industrial arts. General music was less widely offered but elective offerings in instrumental music increased. The increased provision of reading instruction in the middle schools reflected the national interest in its importance.

Increased offerings in computers, creative writing,

health, and sex education in 1988 dramatically reflect school responses to social changes and pressures. In addition to these new courses, the write-ins on the forms added another 26 courses, each usually reported by only one school.

In addition to the foregoing course-type curriculum opportunities for interest exploration and development, the surveys also found, especially in 1988, many "activities" generally available on an elective basis and not offered as classes involving tests and grades. Most of the offerings seem consistent with the exploratory goal, although many educators will regard the increases reported in interschool sports for both boys and girls as undesirable. The percent of schools offering boys' and girls' intramural sports programs also increased significantly. (See Table 4.) In general, the increased offering in number and variety of exploratory subjects and activities confirms new middle schools' wide adherence to this earmark.

Comment

Middle level leaders have tried to recognize consistently the values at this level of extensive exploratory programs, and in general need only to maintain continuing evaluation of the offerings.

TABLE 3
PERCENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS OFFERING CERTAIN TRADITIONAL EXPLORATORY SUBJECTS AS REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE IN GRADES 6, 7, AND 8, 1968 AND 1988

Subject	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Percent		Percent		Percent	
	1968	1988	1968	1988	1968	1988
Art						
Required	74	64	65	50	50	39
Elective	20	17	30	36	40	46
Foreign Language						
Required	32	6	29	9	33	8
Elective	11	10	22	25	29	38
Home Economics						
Required	20	32	43	37	48	31
Elective	9	6	19	30	27	44
Industrial Arts						
Required	18	33	41	38	46	31
Elective	10	9	17	29	25	45
Music						
Required	86	53	67	36	59	25
Elective	34	14	48	18	56	20
Reading						
Required	23	84	25	70	23	60
Elective	17	1	17	5	18	10

TABLE 4
PERCENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS OFFERING CERTAIN OTHER CURRICULUM OPPORTUNITIES (ACTIVITIES) IN GRADES 6, 7, AND 8, 1968 AND 1988

Curriculum Opportunity	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Percent		Percent		Percent	
	1968	1988	1968	1988	1968	1988
Arts and Crafts	7	36	19	37	22	38
Honor Societies	2	20	5	36	6	39
Intramural Sports (Boys)	8	68	20	68	19	66
Intramural Sports (Girls)	7	67	22	65	21	64
Interschool Sports (Boys)	4	29	48	74	52	79
Interschool Sports (Girls)	1	28	19	74	23	78
Photography	4	10	8	15	9	20
Publications	4	36	18	49	25	58
School Parties	24	59	30	58	32	60
Social Dancing	5	47	31	65	37	70
Student Council (Government)	3	80	12	86	14	88

4. Comprehensive curriculum provision for the broad goals of personal development, continued learning skills, and basic knowledge. The critical nature of the personal development goal for the early adolescent requires a variety of approaches, including a teacher advisory plan, a wide offering of exploratory courses and activities, and a full program of health and physical education. All these provisions are increasingly present in the middle schools, except physical education, which is less uniformly taken daily throughout the middle grades.

As for basic knowledge areas, both the 1968 and 1988 surveys found that each of the four major subject areas—language arts, math, science, and social studies—was taken daily in almost 100 percent of middle schools. Certainly these areas are not neglected in the middle schools. We did not collect data on all continued learning skills, but we have already commented on the greatly increased percent of middle schools offering reading on a required basis in 1988 (84, 70, and 60 percent, respectively, in grades 6, 7, and 8). And computer usage, not available in 1968, was as required in 40, 40, and 38 percent of the schools in grades 6, 7, and 8, respectively, with additional

numbers having elective offerings.

In summary, full curriculum provisions for the four basic knowledge areas continued from 1968 to 1988, and some provisions for personal development and continued learning skills had become more frequent and numerous in 1988.

Comment

Middle level faculty members are well aware that for too many people, the middle grades constituted their last chance to acquire the skills and interests needed for lifelong learning. Both school dropouts and adult illiteracy rates can be reduced greatly if we apply the best motivating and learning devices available.

5. Varied and effective instructional methodology for the age group. The authors did not attempt the difficult task of collecting full data about the instructional practices in classrooms. We were, however, so interested in independent study that we included a related question in the 1968 survey and followed this up in 1988.

Considerable increases in opportunities for independent study were evident in the 1988 sample, indicating greater effort toward individualization of instruction in the middle school of 1988. Like most indicators, too few schools have implemented the earmark fully, but there has been considerable progress in 20 years.

Comment

Again, many schools in the middle must adopt more widely the practices used in other successful middle schools.

6. Continued orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers. The school in the middle, whatever grades included, must justify its existence by serving as a strong bridge between elementary and high school. Furthermore, as a relatively new school (68 percent of our 1988 sample had been established in the past 15 years, 31 percent in the last 7) operating more or less in terms of a new concept and set of goals, middle schools must continue for at least another generation to maintain vigorous orientation programs for incoming students, parents, and staff members — most of whom have little if any understanding of the new school unit.

Consequently, we asked about preparatory activities in both surveys and found considerable increase in orientation programs. Still, only 53 percent (as compared with 25 percent in 1968) reported use of a "year or more of faculty study and planning."

Comparison of the surveys showed perceptible increase in visitation to the next level as part of orientation. In addition, more middle schools provide information to the schools below and above, and more middle school students are enrolled in advanced courses at the high school. In only one factor did the percent drop in 20 years: "obtaining or providing data regarding students entering or leaving your schools." However, two-thirds or more of the middle schools in both surveys reported the use of joint workshops and joint curriculum planning activities with teachers of lower and higher grades, and of sharing data about students from level to level.

Comment

Middle level coordinators have challenging opportunities to lead the way in connection with this sixth earmark. Principals and other administrators of schools in the middle must work together to plan for districtwide orientation. Appropriate representatives of feeder elementary schools and their receiving middle level school and, similarly, those of feeder middle schools and their receiving high schools, need leadership in planning and implementing specific means of aiding the successful transition of learners from level to level.

Which Grade Organization?

The term "middle level school" is widely used to include all schools that are preceded by elementary and followed by secondary schools. Figure A showed four relatively large grade groupings of such schools: Grades 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 8-9. There were also 573 schools that used "other" grade groupings. This approximately 5 percent of the total number of schools (and of the sample) was not considered large enough to include in the analysis and presentation of the data about differences between grade groupings.

The provision of the following features of middle level organization differed very little between the major grade groupings: housing arrangements, means of articulation, independent study opportunities, and attitudes toward the grade organization. As for the various other items, an especially strong tendency toward similarities between the grades 5-8 and 6-8 organizations was noted.

Similarly, the grades 7-8 and 7-9 schools tended to be more alike than either one was with the other groupings. Therefore, for convenience and also to emphasize these similarities, grades 5-8 and 6-8 schools are considered as middle school types and the grades 7-8 and 7-9 schools are considered as junior high school types. The differences shown by our 1988 survey were greatest between these two groups on the following points:

- The departmentalized plan of instruction is used more in the junior high types, and the interdisciplinary plan is more popular in the middle school types. (See Figures C and D for percents of middle and junior high school types using interdisciplinary teaming and departmentalization respectively in grade 8.)
- Uniform daily periods are used most in the junior high types, and flexible scheduling is used more in the middle school types. (See Figure E.)

- The reasons for establishing the school originally were slightly more administrative in the junior high school types and more program/student-related in the middle school types.
- Higher percentages of teachers and principals were involved in the decision to establish the new organizations of the middle school types.
- Traditional exploratory subjects tended to be more frequently required in the middle school types than in the junior high school types.
- More use of random assignment for grouping in basic subjects and advisory programs was found in the middle school types.
- Foreign languages were offered more frequently by the junior high types.
- The middle school types, as might be expected, were usually more recently established.

Certain comparisons also indicated that each grade grouping had some distinctive differences from the other three grade groups. Some relevant differences follow:

Grades 5-8 schools:

Made most use of informal pupil progress reports

Made most use of the self-contained classroom organization, but primarily for grades 5 and 6

Made most use of home base teachers (advisers) and other personnel in counseling.

Grades 6-8 schools:

Used more visitation of schools with similar plans in operation as a preparatory activity

Made more use than did grades 7-9 schools of random assignment for grouping in basic subjects

Made most use of interdisciplinary team organization and flexible scheduling.

Grades 7-8 schools:

Had the highest percent of newer exploratory subjects as required

Had the highest use of uniform daily periods.

Grades 7-9 schools:

Had the shortest daily advisory periods

Tended to have the largest enrollments

Undoubtedly because of the widespread acceptance of secondary school preparation, had the largest percent of faculty with special preparation

Had the lowest percent of science and math inclusion in interdisciplinary organization for grades 7 and 8.

Closing Comments

The earmarks against which we checked some of our data about school characteristics should be present in all good schools in the middle, although we expect that changes will develop and other earmarks will be added. Continued discussion, experimentation, and evaluation are essential for agreement on the essential goals and practices of schools in the middle.

After another one or two decades, with a greater supply of personnel who have had the special preparation

Figure C

Percent of Middle and Junior High Schools Utilizing Interdisciplinary Teaming in Selected Subjects, Grade 8, 1988*

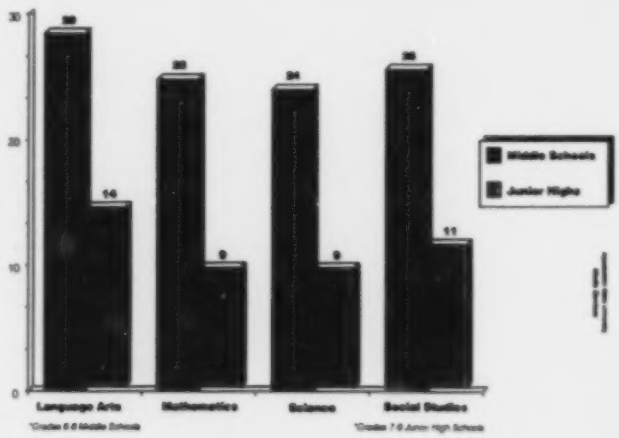
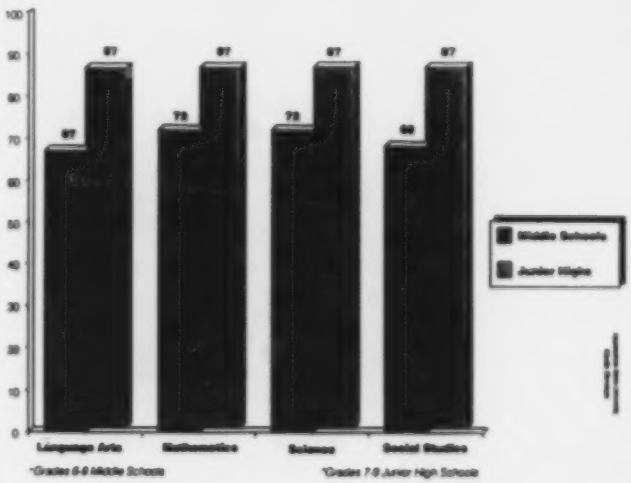
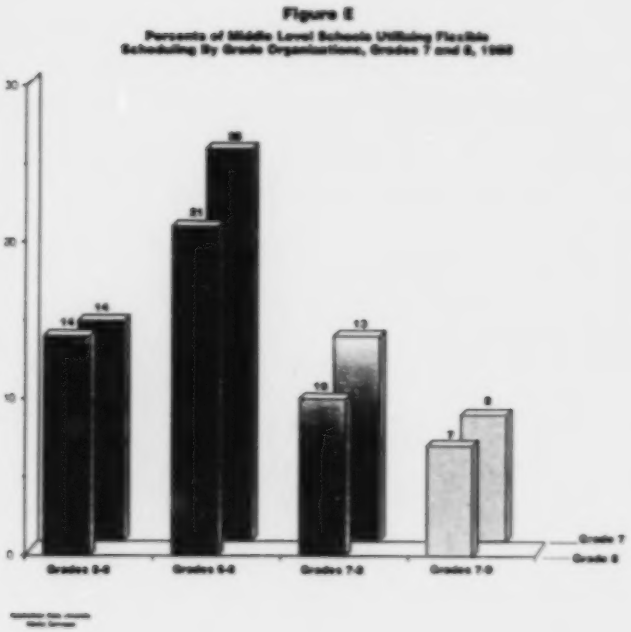


Figure D

Percents of Middle and Junior High Schools Utilizing Departmentalization in Selected Subjects, Grade 8, 1988*





needed, greater unanimity of practice and higher quality of education in the middle should be evident. Without such progress, the much-sought significant improvement in America's total educational program is unlikely if not impossible.

As the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents recently declared: "The success of the transformed middle grade school will stand or fall on the willingness of teachers and other staff to invest their efforts in the young adolescent students. Teachers must understand and want to teach young adolescents and find the middle grade school a rewarding place to work."

The major tasks of leadership in middle level education must focus on the persistent needs of early adolescents for healthy growth and development, for motivation toward and acquisition of essential skills of communication and learning, for exploration and development of worthwhile interests, and for an increasing store of basic knowledge.

Endnotes

1. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, The Report of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Council, June 1989).

2. William M. Alexander, A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools. Final Report, USOE Project No. 7-D-026 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1968).

3. Kenneth Brooks and Francine Edwards, The Middle School in Transition: A Research Report on the Status of the Middle School Movement (Lexington: College of Education, University of Kentucky, 1978).

4. Jerry Valentine, Donald C. Clark, Neal C. Nickerson, Jr., and James W. Keefe, The Middle Level Principalship: Volume I, A Survey of Middle Level Principals and Programs (Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981).

5. William M Alexander and C. Kenneth McEwin, Schools in the Middle: Status and Progress (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1989). Available from National Middle School Association, 4807 Evanswood Drive, Columbus, Ohio, $10.

6. See for example, George E. Melton, "The Junior High School: Successes and Failures," and William M. Alexander, "The Middle School Emerges and Flourishes," in Perspectives: Middle School Education, 1964-84 edited by John H. Lounsbury (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1984).

7. C. Kenneth McEwin and William M. Alexander, Report of Middle Level Teacher Education Programs: A Second Survey (1986-1987) (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian State University, 1987).

8. Representative of current lists are these from two organizations actively engaged in middle level school publications and other programs: National Middle School Association, This We Believe, 1982, and National Association of Secondary School Principals, An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level, undated. Also see the Carnegie Council task report's list of related recommendations.

Successful Middle Level Schools:

B

What They Could Be

The articles in the preceding section identified many of the characteristics of effective middle level schools. These are the middle level schools of the 1980s—schools that struggled to be developmentally responsive, but schools whose effectiveness is still being judged based on criteria developed for elementary or high schools.

What keeps middle level schools from becoming what they could be? In *Middle Level Schools—Once Around the Elephant*, John Lounsbury uses the familiar Hindu fable, "The Blind Men and the Elephant," to draw parallels with today's middle level school and its various constituencies.

Like Alexander, Lounsbury believes lack of public understanding (both on the part of the public and professional educators) concerning middle level education continues to be one of the major barriers to full implementation of the middle level concept.

Lounsbury also believes that failure to see middle level education holistically constitutes another barrier to the implementation of successful middle level schools. The middle level school is significant because of what it is in its totality, not because of separate and at times seemingly unrelated programs.

Middle level curriculum does not exist, contends Lounsbury. What is currently found in most middle level schools is a collection of separate curricula that discourages integration and creates a false dichotomy between academics and exploratories.

In his appeal to create a sense of "wholeness" in the middle level school, Lounsbury discusses the following points:

- **Schools, Society and Values:** Middle level educators must not be timid in advocacy of nearly universally accepted values of civilized living
- **The School Spirit:** The curriculum of climate is as important as the curriculum of content
- **Conviction and Courage:** The importance of having a single universally understood mission that is evident in every component of the school program

In *Middle Level Programs: More Than Academics*, Clark and Clark contend that recommendations of national reports that focus only on academics and higher achievement scores deny the importance of educational programs that respond to the developmental needs of early adolescents. They believe, as Lounsbury does, that the middle level school's program should be balanced.

Citing the research of John Goodlad, NASSP's *The Middle Level Principalship*, and Joan Lipsitz, Clark and Clark point out that parents and teachers are concerned about personal, social, and vo-

cational, as well as academic development of early adolescents. They also support program diversity, appropriate electives, cocurricular activities, and specific programs that respond to developmental needs.

The Clarks also discuss the inappropriateness of using criteria developed at the high school or elementary levels to judge the effectiveness of middle level schools. They favor specific middle level school criteria, such as those developed by Lipsitz, to determine middle level school effectiveness and success.

The Great Debate

James Beane shares the concerns of Clark and Clark about the overemphasis on academics. In *Dance to the Music of Time: The Future of Middle Level Education*, he suggests that current middle level school reforms play one melody while state curriculum mandates play another—the two are out of tune.

There is a tug of war between middle level school improvement programs that focus on developmental responsiveness and the push for academic rigor advocated by national reports and many state legislatures. He contends, as do Clark and Clark, that these academic reforms threaten the inroads the middle level movement has made in recent years toward schools that are good for young adolescents.

Beane looks into the future and offers two scenarios to describe what may possibly happen as a result of this struggle. Scenario 1 has the "back to basics" advocates prevailing and schooling in general remaining much as it is today with unresponsive programs, high drop-out rates, and declining test scores. Scenario 2 describes a broadly based cooperative effort (parents, educators, media, legislators) to develop middle level schools deeply rooted in concerns about their children.

The middle level movement, contends Beane, needs not go the way of the dinosaur. Educators, parents, and concerned community members can secure its continuation. He suggests that some restoration work on the vision needs to be done and that present day middle level reformers must reclaim the ingenuity and boldness of the movement's pioneers.

MAY 1990

Middle Level Schools—Once Around the Elephant

By John Lounsbury

Consider the following Hindu fable, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.
The *First* approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"
The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me' tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"
The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"
The *Fourth* reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"
The *Fifth* who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"
The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"
And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

John Lounsbury, a member of the NASSP Council on Middle Level Education and editor of the Middle School Journal, *gave this speech at the closing general session of the NASSP/Long Conference in Williamsburg, Va., March 17, 1990. It was the consensus of those present that it deserved a wider audience and is, therefore, reprinted here.*

This familiar fable, written by John Godfrey Saxe in the last century, may provide something of a parallel with today's middle level school and its various constituents. With the help of a little imagination on your part, let me explain how the elephant and the six blind men can be likened to today's middle school situation.

While not actually blind, most people who approach the school have inadequate and inappropriate views of this inter-

mediate educational institution. The lack of public understanding concerning middle level education continues as one of the major barriers to full implementation of the middle school concept.

But not only is the general public ill-informed, so too, is the education profession itself. Indeed, many who are actually involved in it have needlessly narrow concepts of the beast, like the men of Indostan who viewed just one part. And, as educators know, one acts on one's perceptions whether they are valid or not.

The math department, for instance, may view the middle school as the place where we sort and select students for the high school math sequence. The coach may perceive the athletic program as the farm system for the high school. The reading teacher may see the school primarily as the place where students go to get what's wrong with them fixed.

The academic block teachers may consider the middle school as preparatory for the high school with its expectations of the mastery of various prerequisites. The pressure to cover that canned content, then, becomes the driving force in their instruction. (Which reminds me of the pointed comment of an eighth grader who was asked, "Are you learning anything in this school?" He replied, "Yes, but I'm learning it so fast I can't remember it.")

Looking at the Whole

But a much greater handicap to the development of effective middle level schools are that great mass of us—citizens, parents, and educators alike—who possess ample peripheral vision yet continue to view it as a collection of separate components.

The elephant, you recall, was not properly described by any of the blind men, for when its various parts were viewed in isolation they gave an invalid picture. The elephant is an entity, a big, solid coordinated mass that is seen properly only when viewed as a whole.

So, too, is the middle level school. It is not just a variety of classes and activities directed by diverse persons and housed in a common physical facility. The middle level school simply is. And what it is, it teaches.

A school is not significant because it has a guidance program, or an exploratory program, or an academic program; it is significant because of what it is in its totality. Its influence is not determined so much by the length of its course offerings list or the stoutness of its remedial program, but because of its collective behavior, its heart.

A school's effectiveness is seriously handicapped when the several parts are not in harmony, and especially when some parts are actually in clear opposition—for instance, when the affective concerns for developing positive self-esteem are countered by a single rigidly imposed numerical grading system. But the school, like the elephant, is a single entity in which all systems, all parts, are or should be interconnected, in synch, and which ultimately can have but one soul.

We must look at the middle level school and its curriculum as a total entity, one that teaches implicitly as well as explicitly. Too long we have addressed school improvement only by dealing with one or more of its parts.

Because we saw, correctly, a lack of concern for the affective domain, we inserted a teacher advisory program in which groups met, for example, for 20 minutes three times a week. Because we recognized a need to broaden our recognition program beyond the honor roll, we added a student-of-the-week program. Because we sensed some kids were falling through the cracks, we asked each teacher to "adopt" one kid for a semester.

A school is not significant because it has a guidance program, or an exploratory program, or an academic program; it is significant because of what it is in its totality.

Now we have created another category, "at-risk" kids, and schools are madly scrambling to develop special programs for this newly labeled group. I can't help asking this question as an aside: Have we created another somewhat artificial category, one more basis for further dividing and fragmenting the educational enterprise, another complication for the schedule maker?—and all on the false assumption that the standard program is okay for most kids?

These and other such separate actions were and are all well-intentioned, and usually to the good, but they perpetuate a piecemeal attack on school reform. Harold Rugg, an eminent professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, declared in 1926 that "for over 50 years, tinkering has characterized the attack on the curriculum." Now 64 more years have passed and literally thousands of projects and millions and millions of dollars have been invested in presumably improving the curriculum—and his assertion is still valid.

Reforming Middle Level Education

Former President Jimmy Carter, when governor of Georgia, tried to institute zero-based budgeting into state government. Although politically, as you might suspect, it could not be implemented, the idea is sound. Typically, next year's budget is built on the existing one. The status quo is the starting point and one adds a little here, quite a bit there, and shaves off just a wee bit someplace else—for psychological effect. But the base is always the current budget and justifications are needed only for major increases. Under zero-based budgeting, however, the starting point is zero. Each dollar, each year, for each item, has to be explained and defended on its merits, whether asking for more or not.

I have long felt that educational leaders might well adopt the concept of zero-based budgeting and apply it to curriculum development. When considering a change in program, educators always start with the existing curriculum, as if it

were semi-sacred and sacrosanct. Then they make adjustments, squeezing a little time from the schedule for a new course, adding another unit to an existing course, but never really tampering with the basic program. Ultimately, about all they end up doing is tinkering.

John Dewey, back in the 1930s, also recognized our timid nature as reformers when he proclaimed, "It is our American habit if we find the foundations of our educational structure unsatisfactory to add another story or wing. We find it easier to add a new study or course or kind of school than to reorganize existing conditions so as to meet the need."

How true. But the time for seeking educational improvement by adding new courses, new textbooks, or revised courses of study has passed. Tinkering simply will no longer suffice as a means of educational reform. We must, quite literally, first revise, then reconceptualize, and finally restructure.

To truly reform middle level education we must get down to brass tacks, start from zero, put aside our assumptions about periods, courses, class sizes, even certification fields. The only givens should be our knowledge of the nature and needs of early adolescents, the principles of learning, and the tenets and needs of our democratic society.

We must stand back from school, view it as a whole, be sensitive to the interrelatedness of its elements, and remove ourselves from those many momentary problems that hold our attention so that we can contemplate seriously.

If we practiced zero-based curriculum development with those givens, would we ever come up with the program of separate subjects and disjointed entities that we now operate? Would we ever design that rat race we now provide that has students moving from pillar to post every 45 minutes? Surely we would create a better match between the known developmental needs of early adolescents and the educational program provided for them.

If we are to reform our public schools and make them truly responsive to the needs of today's youth and the needs of society, we cannot simply do better what is now common practice. New wine cannot be poured into old wineskins; neither can the needed reforms be contained in the traditionally organized school day.

Some bold actions are needed. We must stand back from school, view it as a whole, be sensitive to the interrelatedness of its elements, and remove ourselves from those many momentary problems that hold our attention so that we can contemplate seriously.

We must go once, twice, three times around our elephant school with our eyes wide open and think about its place in the total environment, its ecology, its ultimate impact on those who attend it. This is not to deny the significance of its current service or the good that is now being wrought by its caring teachers.

We all must, however, recognize a major reality that we haven't yet faced. Despite our continued use of the singular, *currently there simply is no middle school curriculum, only a collection of separate curricula.*

This is a major concept, and I ask you to consider it thoughtfully. If it is a truth, as I think it is, then we must become, if we are not already, educational philosophers and educational statesmen, as well as educational administrators or instructors. We must grapple with and help others grapple with the tough questions about educational objectives, priorities, and student needs, questions that have no easy answers.

We must attack curriculum on a schoolwide basis, reckon with the implicit curriculum as well as the explicit one. We will need to put aside many old assumptions, for as Josh Billings, a character from literature perceptively expressed it, "It weren't my ignorance that done me in, it was the things I knowed that weren't so."

One aspect of restructuring that must be dealt with is the false dichotomy that has been created between academics and exploratories. We continue to refer to them as if they were not only separate programs, but also of unequal importance—clearly wrong on both counts. The middle level school is the exploratory school and everything that is done therein should be approached in an exploratory mode.

At a time when youth's horizons are expanding, their vision broadening, and their curiosity heightened, the school program remains all too narrow, too much of the same in both subjects and methodologies. Middle level education has a horizon-expanding exploratory responsibility that has typically been underserved while a tunnel vision approach prevails.

At best, the basic subjects and the exploratories have remained side by side, not truly integrated. The material studied is often remote and irrelevant. It usually lacks the emotional tone that the arts, if integrated, could give it.

Schools, Society, and Values

I can now be classified as a senior citizen. I do not try to hide from that status, but I do try to guard against assuming that posture that is so often associated with the elderly in their views toward youth and the present. But try as I do, I confess I cannot shake the deepening concern I have about the state of our society. And certainly the statistics regarding violence, crime (white collar even more than blue), teenage pregnancy, drug use, child abuse, suicide, etc., lend ample support for my increasingly fatalistic views about where we are headed.

A recent survey reported in *Redbook* magazine, for instance, revealed these disturbing statistics:

- Eight of 10 eighth graders have used alcohol—more than half of them by sixth grade. Over one-third had an alcoholic drink last month.
- One in 20 eighth graders had used cocaine.
- One in 10 preteens has thought of suicide.

In light of these and comparable indicators of the state of our society—such as the staggering fact that our prison population has doubled in the last 10 years—I believe America is approaching a critical crossroads in what to date has been its phenomenal development as a successful, civilized nation.

Education, inevitably, must play a role in determining which road our nation will choose. In 1932, a leading progressive educator named George Counts wrote a small book entitled, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* Those who answered affirmatively were called "social reconstructionists" and considerable debate ensued as the more traditionally accepted and narrow role of the school as a perpetuator of the status quo was questioned.

Call me a social reconstructionist if you will, but I cannot avoid asking a related question in 1990, "Do we dare *not* seek to build a new social order through the school?"

America desperately needs to renew or reaffirm those values that have been the common denominators of our democratic society. I'm not sure the nation can survive many more decades unless the values that undergirded our society and were largely responsible for its rise to prominence are ingested and then practiced by the younger generations.

Students and teachers must work together in deciding what to learn and how to learn it. We don't just need hands-on experiences in middle level schools, we need hands-joined approaches.

In many respects we have become victims of our own success. The material successes gained through capitalism and the high standard of living now so broadly enjoyed have made us vulnerable and self-satisfied. Man's selfishness has been too well served and the common good has been slighted—witness the current state of professional athletics.

The president of Brown University, Vartan Gregorian, claimed that the three scourges in the '90s will be mental gridlock in the form of undigested information, cultural anorexia in the form of self-inflicted ignorance, and national amnesia toward our heritage—a frightening but plausible prediction.

The sociologist Amitai Etzioni claims that America has become hollow, that we have turned our backs on the concept of community in favor of an obsessive self-centeredness and excessive individualism. He says we need to restore "mutuality" and "civility" and reaffirm traditional relationships and shared concerns. Etizioni further says that the school must be rebuilt before society can be revitalized.

I agree, except I might reverse or make parallel the two elements and perhaps phrase it thusly: we cannot rebuild schools without also rebuilding society.

But putting aside the chicken-egg dilemma, I am convinced that if our society is to be regenerated, if the old values of our society are to be reaffirmed, the middle level school must be the birthplace of this renewal. Regrettably, but truthfully, no other institution in our society is in as favorable a position to do what is needed.

We must create in our middle schools an *atmosphere of ethics* where direct attention is given to matters of right and wrong, good and bad, to the ethical aspects of various social issues, where improved *behavior* is the openly acknowledged goal.

While the school's job is certainly not to push a particular religious dogma or narrow set of beliefs, it is incumbent upon the school to stand for those many values that *are* held in common by all but the most extreme reactionary or radical. As playwright William Inge stated: "The aim of education is the knowledge not of fact, but of values."

The ancient Greeks advised us "to pay attention to the young and make them as *good* as possible." Note that they did not say as "smart" as possible or as "knowledgeable" as possible, but rather as *good* as possible. So, restructuring the middle level school means that the development of attitudes, character, and values must be an overt responsibility across the curriculum. Middle level education inescapably is a moral enterprise.

We cannot afford to be timid, fearful of offending in our advocacy of those nearly universally accepted values of civilized living—and I see no real conflict between those values and our strong commitment to being a culturally pluralistic society.

Nor do I see any conflict between the middle level school's primary responsibility for developing youth's intellect and the responsibility for helping youth develop their values and character. In fact, as I see it, a central tenet of middle level education that must be recognized by citizens and educators alike is this: there is no conflict between academic effectiveness and developmental responsiveness at the age of early adolescence.

Rather, the former can be achieved most effectively only when the latter is attended to overtly. To teach adolescents the knowledge and skills they need, the middle level school must also help them in their social, emotional, moral, and physical development.

Teachers and principals cannot avoid being role models and as such they are torch bearers of a value system, of ethical standards. Unfortunately, there are today, too many torch bearers of other conflicting values prominently on display—which is all the more reason why an educator should avoid being Casper Milquetoast.

The School Spirit

The collective attitude of the faculty is the reflection of the values and beliefs of the individual professionals. It determines the culture of the school, its ethos. The students learn readily what their school stands for. The curriculum of climate is as important as the curriculum of content. The school's clout, its power, resides more in this culture than its content. The school itself is a teacher.

When Lawrence Durrell was writing travel narratives, he coined the term "spirit of place" to describe how the quality of

place affects us. Place, as Durrell understood, has a major impact on us, and the school is a place, it has a spirit.

Howard Johnston has said: "The creation of the school culture that is necessary to achieve excellence is more dependent upon the behavior of *adults* in the school than on characteristics of students, economic climates of the community in which the school is located, per pupil expenditure, physical facilities, or a host of other demographic-environmental variables."

Think about that—it is a powerful idea. It takes away so many of our rationalizations, nearly all of them, in fact. *The behavior of adults*—you and the faculty—is what matters most. And the key here is not knowledge nor technique, not materials nor courses, but *attitude*! It is attitudes, just as much as organizations, that must be "restructured."

To change the attitudes of both students and faculty, restructuring will surely have to involve the development of smaller, more intimate learning communities. Such units can enhance student-teacher relationships, aid teachers in knowing students as individuals, encourage the kinds of discussions that will illuminate values and assist youngsters in their social and emotional development as well as in their academic development.

Forming interdisciplinary teams is one major means of moving in that direction, but it is not the destination. The failure to truly integrate the separate subjects when teams are formed is a disappointing reality that disturbs many of us.

> If we are to build the real middle level school, the school that is developmentally responsive and intellectually vigorous, it will take conviction and courage.

Middle level teachers must be encouraged to step outside their certification comfort zones and reach for new learnings. Their job will have to be redefined as they move from being presenters of content to becoming directors of learning. They should be able to say to their students, in effect, "You ask of me the way and I point ahead, ahead of myself as well as you. I am a fellow traveler with you, my students, as we pursue knowledge and understanding."

Students and teachers must work together in deciding what to learn and how to learn it. We don't just need hands-on experiences in middle level schools, we need hands-joined approaches.

Increasing the amount of time particular students and their teachers spend together will inevitably move us from the turn teaching that prevails in most teamed situations almost as much as in departmentalized situations. Smaller teams of just two or three and the problem-centered block of time under the direction of one teacher, the real core curriculum, are likely to become more common. So, too, will student-teacher progression plans which keep teams of students and teachers together for more than one year.

Conventional wisdom has long taken the position that putting all your eggs in one basket is a very questionable practice. In education, however, I think we've gone too far in the other direction, in dividing up our educational responsibilities and providing specialized personnel for each facet.

The middle level should reverse the trend toward specialization and separation. If we put more of our resources in good classroom teachers with reasonable loads and kept them together with a group of students for more than a period a day, we wouldn't need so many specialists, each with his or her own little domain and time slot and all adding to the fragmentation of the curriculum.

Principals have become almost gun-shy because of all the attention given to their importance. In the last decade or so nearly every educational pronouncement has included statements about the key role of the building administrator. They cannot, it seems, escape either the spotlight or the responsibility. But so it is, and so it must be. Principals are responsible for the physical climate and equally for the psychological climate. They must be not just administrators but persons who enrich life, create community, establish a sense of mission, instill meaning, and personify the school's philosophy. Faculty morale, ultimately, depends on having faith in the person at the top.

Conviction and Courage

Six blind men, depending on their sense of touch, perceived the elephant in very different, but equally erroneous ways. Parents and educators, though possessing sight, are often partially blinded by personal perceptions and old assumptions, and in their walk around the middle school, don't really see it at all.

The time has come to examine the middle school as it is, to view it as an entity, to be sensitive to what it really teaches and what it really doesn't teach, and to understand the importance of having a single, universally understood mission that is evident in every component of the school's program.

Educators and parents alike must recognize that the curriculum that counts ultimately is the one that changes behavior and is still apparent in the lives of students 10 or 20 years hence.

An excessive concern over the short-term memory aspects of a formal education is likely to be counter-productive. It is all too easy to get up-tight about the fact failures of our youth and institute a narrow plan to correct these knowledge deficiencies. Such approaches are likely to hinder the development of attitudes and values that are of far more ultimate importance.

Certainly, the restructuring road that lies ahead will not be easy to traverse. Although the goal can now begin to be envisioned and there are increasingly more lights along the way to guide our trip, only the most naive would believe the jour-

ney can be accomplished without travails and set-backs.

A visitor to the magnificent Cathedral of Notre Dame commented out loud, "Why don't they build structures like this any more?" An old gentleman standing there responded quietly but firmly, "Because those people had convictions. People today only have opinions."

That statement carries a message for us. If we are to build the real middle level school, the school that is developmentally responsive and intellectually vigorous, it will take convictions and courage.

Let us then take both as our charge and our personal conviction these words from the German philosopher Goethe: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."

SEPTEMBER 1986

Middle Level Programs: More Than Academics

by Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark

In response to national commission reports and recommendations, many state and local school boards have mandated that new, more rigorous academic standards should be applied not only to high schools, but to middle level schools as well.

As a result, many middle level principals are pressured to modify existing programs in ways that will significantly reduce their responsiveness to early adolescent needs.

Middle level educators must be wary of incorporating into middle level programs, ideas, recommendations, and research findings that emerge from high schools and elementary schools.

As Troisi (1983) points out:

> Most of the research on school effectiveness has been conducted at the elementary school level, and largely in urban settings. It has focused on basic skills instruction. Since there are significant organizational differences between elementary, middle, and secondary schools, generalizing from one level of research to another is at best problematical . . . .
>
> Studies conducted by Research for Better Schools (RBS), the regional educational laboratory, highlight these differences. RBS cautions that basic educational structure at the secondary level may necessitate different approaches to improving effectiveness and even different definitions of effectiveness.

Recommendations that focus on academics and higher achievement scores deny the importance of educational programs that respond to the developmental needs of adolescents.

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Most middle level principals are concerned about the extent to which teachers and parents support the push for academics.

John Goodlad's *A Place Called School;* the NASSP National Study of Schools in the Middle, *The Middle Level Principalship, Vol. II, The Effective Principal;* and Joan Lipsitz's *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents,* provide excellent information on teacher's and parent's opinions and priorities.

Teachers: What Are Their Opinions and Priorities?

Goodlad, in his comprehensive A Study of Schooling, asked middle level teachers to grade their schools. Using an A-F system, Goodlad averaged the grades of each of 12 middle level schools. Nine of the schools received a B and three received a C, indicating overall teacher satisfaction with their schools.

Goodlad also asked teachers to rate the importance of four common focuses of American schools:

1. Academic—encompassing all intellectual skills and domains of knowledge
2. Vocational—developing readiness for productive work and economic responsibility
3. Social and Civic—preparing for socialization into a complex society
4. Personal—emphasizing the development of individual responsibility, talent, and free expression.

Teachers, parents, and students rated all four focuses as "very important"; however, further investigation by Goodlad determined that less than half the teachers ranked the academic/intellectual category as most important. Other teacher preferences were spread evenly across social, personal, and vocational goals, indicating that a substantial number of teachers

would be unhappy to see such goals abandoned.

Phase II of the NASSP/Dodge Foundation National Study of Schools in the Middle investigated 50 successful middle level schools. Questionnaires and interviews were used to ascertain information on a wide variety of middle level issues. While teachers and parents were not asked about the purposes of middle level education, they were asked to identify their school's strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers ranked diversity of program, flexibility, excellent teachers, and variety of course offerings as being major strengths. Scheduling problems, insufficient finances, and mainstreaming were listed as areas of program weakness (Keefe et al., 1983). The teachers' comments indicated a strong concern for flexibility and variety.

Joan Lipsitz, in her study, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*, asked 100 researchers and practitioners to each identify five characteristics of effective schools for early adolescents. She found that "few respondents devoted more than one or two of their five answers to academics—they focused on developmental responsiveness . . . . This choice reflects a belief among some that the middle grade years are not years for vigorous intellectual pursuit. It in part reflects a confusion about the academic purposes of middle and junior high schools."

She goes on to say, "emphasis on personal and social development is acknowledgment of the compelling needs of young adolescents that less effective schools ignore or attempt to combat, and . . . that the outcomes that successful schools for young adolescents expect to effect encompass attitudes and behavior as well as teachable skills" (Lipsitz, 1984).

Based on her survey, Lipsitz identified the following seven categories of needs that must be addressed by schools if they are to respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents:

1. Competence and achievement
2. Self-exploration and definition
3. Social interaction with peers and adults
4. Physical activity
5. Meaningful participation in the school and community
6. Routine, limits, and structure
7. Diversity.

Lipsitz examined these categories in four highly successful middle level schools. From her observations and interviews with teachers in these schools, she drew the following conclusions:

> . . . staff, administration, and parents of the four schools claim that developmental responsiveness is central to their success. The study finds that *developmental responsiveness does not preclude academic success.* The study also finds that developmental responsiveness is appropriate in a broad range of communities with a broad range of clientele.

When asked what special characteristics of their school could be replicated elsewhere, the teachers emphasized four points:

1. Any school can have a clear philosophy about the learning environment.
2. A climate can be established that is characterized by "consistency of expectations, a positive climate about young adolescents, and a high level of energy in job performance."
3. Teachers must be recognized as professionals, especially in the area of instruction.
4. Isolation can be reduced by allowing for small focus groups and joint teacher planning time.

Information from these three studies indicate strong teacher support for schools that emphasize more than just academics. Teachers recognize the importance of a variety of goals and purposes (Goodlad), the need for flexibility and diversity of programs (NASSP), and the appropriateness of developmentally responsive schools (Lipsitz).

Parents: What Are Their Opinions, Priorities?

When Goodlad asked parents of students attending the 12 middle level schools he studied to rate the schools, parents responded with 11 Bs and 1 C.

> Clearly the predominantly B ratings of elementary and middle schools convey rather substantial satisfaction . . . . Overall, the data do not convey the deep parental dissatisfaction with their schools that supposedly has prevailed widely. Nor do they lead to the conclusion that parents have a perception of all being well with the school their children attend.

Goodlad also asked parents to rate the broad goals of education (academic, vocational, social and civic, and personal). He found that parents on the average rated all four areas as "very important."

Of particular importance to middle level educators are Goodlad's findings regarding the importance that parents placed on personal and social goals. Personal goals were rated "very important" by 80 percent of parents of middle level students, while social goals were judged to be "very important" by 66 percent of the parents.

When he asked parents to rank the four goals in order of importance, half of them chose the academic category as most important. But, Goodlad states, ". . . the fact that the other half distributed this preferential choice across the social, personal, and vocational goals implies that a substantial number of these parents . . . would be unhappy to have such goals eliminated."

Goodlad summarizes his findings:

> Our data thus show no withering in goal commitments by the parent group we sampled, and indeed I do not know of serious studies that come up with a narrow list of parental expectations of schools. When it comes to education, it appears that most parents want their children to have it all. I believe, then, that many policy makers have to be misinterpreting parents' expectations for schools and then overreacting to this misinterpretation. (Goodlad 1984)

During Phase II of the NASSP/Dodge Foundation National Study of Schools in the Middle, interviewers sought parent opinions on a variety of issues and concerns.

When asked about school climate, parents identified the following areas as being important: "firm, consistent, fair administration of rules, policies, and discipline . . . attractive facilities, activities for students, support by the community . . . openness and acceptance of people and ideas, and good communication" (Keefe et al., 1983).

Parental concerns about the schools were often conspicuously absent. Those making suggestions focused on improving learning opportunities and refining existing programs. When discussing program strengths, parents identified, in order, "strong elective program, program diversity, strong academics, good teachers, and flexibility, balance, and mastery learning."

Parents spoke of weak programs in a variety of areas such as foreign language, social studies, math, and science. Some parent groups felt their schools were weakened by lack of accelerated programs for talented children, teachers spread too thin (teaching out of their subject area or teaching too many classes), and too much emphasis on sports.

Parental opinion as reported in the NASSP study appears to indicate strong support for diversity, positive school climate, specialized programs, and balance.

In studying four successful middle level schools, Lipsitz found that parents were satisfied when the achievement of their children approximated parental expectations, when there were conducive learning climates, and when parents believed that their children's personal and academic needs were being met.

The following comments are indicative of what parents have found in successful middle level schools:

- The teachers expect a lot. They invite the children to learn. They expect a lot of the children. They expect a lot of the parents, also, and the parents rise to that level and support the school . . . .
- Parents are clear about how they judge the school's effectiveness; the children are eager to attend; they cannot wait to leave elementary school and get to the middle school; they are close to their teachers; their test scores are high; their behavior is good; they are happy . . . .
- . . . Every teacher was interested in children. In other schools there's rigid discipline. Children can't express themselves. Here if they see something wrong, they speak up. Someone always has time for you . . . and there's a variety of things to do and choose . . . .
- . . . Most important, their children are performing well and have the advantage of the rich curricular and extracurricular programs offered for all of the students in the school . . . .

These comments reflect a strong emphasis on learning through involvement, excitement, and diversity. Climate factors such as caring, commitment, receptiveness, and happiness are also emphasized.

Lipsitz recognizes that most parents are apprehensive about the middle years of schooling. She suggests that programs that involve parents and provide them with information about early adolescent development are ways of dispelling this apprehension. She states, ". . . the most effective thing schools do to relieve parental apprehension is to send home, day after day, happy children who are progressing well."

These three studies indicate that parents expect much more from middle level schools than just academics. They are concerned about the social, personal, vocational, and intellectual development of their children. They are concerned about program diversity, electives, and cocurricular activities.

Finally, they are concerned that their children be involved in school programs that are responsive to their developmental needs.

Implications for Middle Level Schools

Early adolescence is a unique period in each child's life, a time when major changes are taking place psychologically, socially, and physically.

While middle level educators are becoming increasingly aware of the special needs of these students and are attempting to implement programs that are developmentally responsive, they are at the same time facing pressures from both elementary school researchers and secondary school commission reports to concentrate on the academic preparation of students.

Middle level educators must become more knowledgeable and more vigilant if they wish to preserve the concept of middle level schools designed to meet the unique needs of early adolescents. Some steps a middle level principal can take are:

1. Resist implementing recommendations of national

commission reports in your school without sufficient study and research. Insist that those who want these programs implemented must supply data about how the recommendations are developmentally responsive to the needs of early adolescents.

Goodlad showed in his study that both teachers and parents want a broad-based curricular program. The narrowly focused recommendations of a Nation at Risk are not supported by educators or parents, a fact that prompted Goodlad to state: "I believe that many policy makers have been misinterpreting parents' expectations for schools and overreacting to that misinterpretation."

2. Be cautious about generalizing the effective school research and accepting it as viable for the middle level school. Much of the focus of these studies was to improve the math and reading achievement scores of students in urban elementary schools. Because of its uniqueness, it is not possible to generalize the findings of elementary school research to the middle level school (Troisi, 1983).

3. Carefully examine any recommendation that proposes to eliminate everything but the basics. Emphasis on academics only is unresponsive to the developmental needs of middle level students and is unsupportable in terms of teacher and parent support. It is also unsupportable in terms of opinions held by 100 researchers and practitioners identified by Lipsitz (1984).

4. Acquaint yourself with the developmental needs of early adolescents. Current research is examining transition, self-esteem, thinking skills, cognitive development, and learning styles. Your school will not be developmentally responsive unless you know about the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs of your students.

5. Become knowledgeable of successful middle level programs. With a knowledge of "what works," you can make informed choices about your program and then make the necessary modifications that will ensure acceptability in your community.

Successful practices from other middle level schools can be adapted to fit the needs of another school and its community.

6. Be cognizant that school improvement is a complex process that requires comprehensive and systematic planning. You can facilitate the planning process by developing a long-range plan that incorporates assessment, a mission statement, goals and objectives, implementation strategies, timelines, staff development, and evaluation.

From the information obtained by Goodlad, NASSP, and Lipsitz, middle level principals can be reasonably confident that teachers and parents will be supportive of plans that seek to make the school developmentally responsive.

7. Include in program development, active parent and teacher participation. This includes involvement in planning and participation in workshops designed to increase each person's knowledge of the early adolescent and his or her unique needs.

Conclusion

Times are difficult for middle level educators. Much of what we believe in is being challenged by the increased emphasis on academics and test scores. It is reassuring to know that in the work of Goodlad, NASSP, and Lipsitz, we can find support for the important issues related to middle level education.

The following statement from Harvard Professor Paul Ylvisaker brings into focus the mission of middle level educators:

"I remember what I devoutly wished as a parent: that there would be at least one faculty/staff person in a school to whom my child could relate: that there be at least one classroom/school experience that would give my child a feeling of inspiration and success . . . ." (Lipsitz, 1984).

The mission of every middle level principal is to make sure that all students enrolled in his or her school have teachers to whom they can relate and a developmentally responsive program that will inspire them and give them feelings of success.

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Dance to the Music of Time: The Future of Middle Level Education

James A. Beane

We live in a time of remarkable ironies.

Recently, some states issued reports in favor of continuing progressive middle level reform. The reports address the characteristics of early adolescents and their needs deeply rooted in the affective domain and call for schools with organization and curricula designed to help early adolescents down the path toward personal and social growth.

Yet these same states have also passed new curriculum mandates that so heavily embrace academic accountability that educators see little time for affective issues in the middle grades.

So we see this strange irony: While the middle level movement grows it has also fallen on hard times. Reports on middle level school improvement play one melody while state curriculum mandates play another. And the two are oddly out of tune, hardly in harmony.

Here are two great and powerful forces: the middle level reform movement of the past two decades and the academic rigor push of more recent times. Some say the pendulum has swung toward academics; perhaps in 1987 the pendulum metaphor is not quite appropriate. Maybe a tug-of-war would better suit this case. The two forces pull in opposite directions and only time and effort tell the outcome.

We could write many scenarios to tell what may come of the struggle between the middle level and the academic rigor movements. Following are two that represent the extreme possibilities in this dance to the music of time.

Eventual reality will probably lie somewhere between them and the nature of events will undoubtedly be more complex, but the ultimate outcomes may be no different than in these two.

Someone must pay the piper; whoever pays the piper will eventually call the tune.

Scenario 1: A Circle Two-Step*

Looking back from the year 2017, it all seemed inevitable. They should have seen it coming.

Beginning in the early 1970s critics of the school demanded more emphasis on basic skills in reading, mathematics, and writing. Their insistence was fueled by media reports of failing schools. Whether these claims were accurate or not, their widespread acceptance was reflected in increasingly poor ratings citizens gave to the schools.

By the late 1970s most states had instituted basic competency tests, reportedly to guarantee that high school graduates had mastered basic skills, but also to assuage public demands for evidence of school improvement.

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*A circle two-step begins with partners dancing to slow-beat music. The pace of the music gradually quickens and suddenly stops. Then there is a switch of partners and the slow-to-fast-to-stop cycle is repeated. This goes on, cycle after cycle, until all possible combinations are exhausted and you end up dancing with your original partner.

While most school districts reported high levels of student success on competency tests, the critics and the media continued to focus on the need for improvement.

New political winds arose in the early 1980s and they blew on many social institutions, including the schools. New voices were added to the clamor for education reform, and new items were added to the agenda. Attention shifted from basic survival competencies to the academic rigor of high school programs.

In the 1980s the Japanese were building better automobiles, and the schools were blamed for the demise of the United States in the international marketplace.

No matter that the industrial age was breaking up, especially in North America. No matter that the United States was plunging into the information age. No matter that politicians and business leaders had failed or refused to foresee this shift.

The United States was losing ground in the international trade and people were out of work. The fault lay with the schools.

Scores on SATs had dropped; teachers were incompetent; students were lazy. High school programs were filled with non-academic junk courses; the secular humanists were destroying the moral fabric of youth by infiltrating the schools; our educational programs had a bad hangover from the aimless 1960s.

The bell of reform was tolling, and clearly it tolled for the schools.

What had started as a simple call for basics in education had been transformed into an all-out assault on the quality of school programs. Spurred by national commission reports, state after state moved to tighten the academic belt around schools. On the surface, the solution seemed simple: raise the standards a little, up the credits required for high school graduation, stop watering down the textbooks.

But between and behind the lines was a broader agenda and a deeper meaning. It had to do with narrowing the school's focus to academic programs alone.

The logic went like this: The school's purpose is intellectual development through exposure to classic academic disciplines. Students are failing to realize this purpose because the schools are filled with distractions—social-oriented courses, careless teaching, wasted time, and non-academic subjects. If only we could focus the requirements and push a little harder and a little sooner, the rigors of a classical education could be rescued from the jaws of mediocrity.

Further, we could gain ground even more quickly if we began high school education and its credit requirements in junior high or middle school. And so the bell tolled—not only for the high schools, but for the middle level schools as well.

In the reform movement of the '80s, like times of change before, there were certainly ironies. Perhaps none was odder than the push to move the pieces of the high school program into the middle level.

Apparently many districts had developed what were called middle schools, organized to meet the needs of early adolescents, a group that some theorists and even a few practitioners called "transescents." These schools had teaching teams that were supposed to create interdisciplinary programs, advisory programs to provide broad-based counseling for affective concerns, block schedules to allow the teaching teams some time flexibility, and other innovative arrangements.

Behind all this, according to literature of the time, was an attempt to know and understand the developmental characteristics of early adolescents—hardly an article, book, or report from that time can be found that did not begin with a recitation of such characteristics.

What does seem strange is that authors kept saying that this middle level movement was sweeping the country, but their writings seem to have been mostly confined to journals and books for middle level educators.

What seems even more ironic is that those who reported success in the middle level movement apparently did little in their own defense.

When then-Education Secretary William Bennett, the loudest voice for classical academics, wrote about improving elementary education, he described the elementary school as K-8. And no cries of "foul" from the middle level were heard.

When Bennett said that schools get fuzzy after grade four, no one protested that he didn't understand that maybe the lives of youth were what got fuzzy.

When researchers claimed that algebra and geometry should be taught in the seventh grade because United States students did not fare well on international achievement comparisons, hardly a whimper was heard.

When high school courses and accelerated programs were pushed into middle level schools, people complained but did as they were told and began to get used to it.

When college and university reformers suggested that even elementary school teachers have separate subject certification through an undergraduate academic major, the middle level proponents of interdisciplinary curriculum were silent. Perhaps they thought it was a bad dream and the waking would be soon. But still the bells tolled.

High school graduation credits increased. High school teachers complained about students' lack of

preparation while students themselves complained that they could not fit everything they needed into four years.

Reluctantly, but obediently, middle level schools accepted more and more of the high school program into theirs. In their hearts some educators knew that many students were falling through cracks in the system, but they also knew that five or six years later those same students would blame them if they fell short of graduation requirements.

Other middle level educators were actually happy with this development because deep in their hearts they had always wanted to be at the high school level; for them the middle level movement of the previous two decades had only been a hiccup of student-centered mollycoddling.

Many of their colleagues had been riding the fence and only a few strong rejoinders were needed to pull them back over to the academic side. By the mid-1990s the middle level program looked just like the high school program of the 1970s and, yes, even like that of the 1950s.

Sure, the dropout rate had increased, but many thought that perhaps those students didn't belong in school anyway. Some even used the dropout rate as an argument to solidify the academic concentration in the middle level school; their reasoning was that at least those who later dropped out were exposed to a serious curriculum before they left.

It may even be suggested that this line of reasoning was the impetus for the move to lower the compulsory leaving age to 14, which gathered such momentum by the mid-1990s.

As hindsight now allows us to see, it was this push for a classical academic core, introduced at earlier and earlier grades, that was the heart and soul of the whole movement. Its popularity was what allowed the other pieces to fall into place. Its power was what paralyzed resistance. Its strength was what made the bells toll.

By 1991 the National Governors' Task Force on Education had clarified what they called the "indicators of quality education" and implemented the tests of state achievement comparisons that would later become the Governors' Examination Program.

This development led both local and state authorities to finally move away from the few affective programs that had hung on into the 1990s. By 1995 fewer than 2 percent of middle level schools reported having advisory programs or elective activities.

Oddly, what fundamentalist groups of the mid-1980s had tried unsuccessfully to do for moral reasons happened later simply because of the exclusion of affective dimensions from the "indicators of quality education."

The final blow for affective programs came in 1998 when federal and state aid were legally tied to the national testing program.

When the national media pushed the matter of prestige and suggested that those states with the highest scores were the best bets for residential and business locations, state authorities were sucked into the test score competition.

And, since the aid legislation gave the greatest benefits to those states and districts that had the highest scores, resistance was over for sure.

From a historical perspective this aid formula was remarkable. Starting in the 1960s the rule of thumb for financial aid was to give greatest support to those locales where student achievement was lowest. The new aid formula reversed that custom on the grounds that if the United States were to compete on the international scene, it was necessary to give the greatest support to those who seemed most promising.

So it was not surprising that states and local districts began using the Governors' Tests at the sixth grade level to sort out students with low achievement and select those with high scores to attend accelerated middle level programs.

Nor was it surprising that local districts allocated the most resources to these accelerated programs, especially when the Governors' Commission finally agreed to give greater weight to the scores of students in those programs.

The sorting and selecting process so long denied by American educators, but always hidden beneath their rhetoric, was finally admitted and even praised. And with that recognition came the end of a general education for all students that at one time had been the central purpose of middle level schools, but had now gone the way of the dinosaur.

And so the bells tolled, more loudly than before.

Meanwhile, other pieces of the educational puzzle began to fit in their places. Colleges and universities completed their own reform programs in teacher education.

Early in the twentieth century, undergraduate programs for preparing elementary school teachers began to focus on general academic knowledge and clear understanding of children.

When the middle level reform movement emerged in the 1960s and '70s, its proponents claimed that the new schools should look more like elementary than high schools in programs and organization. Using this line of reasoning, many educators argued that middle level preparation should be focused more on the characteristics of early adolescents than on academic concentration.

Some state authorities concurred and certification regulations were changed to recognize the new preparation programs for middle level teachers. Of course, the move toward more and earlier academic rigor in the schools changed all that. In the mid-1980s, many universities began eliminating pedagogy from teacher education programs and requiring more academic coursework in its place.

By the early 1990s this configuration was widespread and even elementary teachers were required to major in academic areas with certification granted by subject area through a national licensing board.

A few college and university programs tried to resist this movement but were soon overwhelmed by pressure from the outside including federal and state authorities, local schools, and, of course, the media. Those whose professional complaints actually obscured job security issues often found themselves legislated out of existence as pedagogical preparation was turned over to the local schools, which had also lost interest in it.

So it was that by the mid-1990s not only had colleges and universities broken away from teacher education, but the idea of pedagogical understanding had mostly disappeared. In the push for academic excellence there really was little need to know about students. In the press for acceleration of selected students not much would have been done with the information anyway.

Those who had stood for middle level teacher preparation programs that emphasized understanding of early adolescents and the appropriate techniques for adapting curriculum and teaching to their characteristics now wore the emperor's new clothes. And the bells still tolled.

Educators in the twentieth century used to talk about cycles of school reform through the metaphor of a swinging pendulum. Supposedly it swung periodically from academic-centered concerns to student-centered interests and inevitably back again. No matter how unpopular a given idea was at any time, if one clung to it, it would finally rise to the surface.

Such was the case for middle level educators in the mid-1980s as the pendulum swung away from their reform movement. Only a few middle level educators were seriously concerned with how they might permanently secure the place of their efforts in the continuing educational scene. Even as the pendulum swung further away, many played the waiting game while others grabbed on for the ride. Either they didn't foresee or didn't care that metaphors, too, go out of style; that in social behavior the pendulum is propelled by ideology.

Without public reminders of alternative ideas, those in fashion go unchallenged. Finally the metaphor wears out, the pendulum stops swinging. And so it did. Though the exact date is hard to fix, many historians point to the year 2003.

- The middle level schools were already thoroughly and completely academic schools.
- The Governors' tests were in place.
- Sixth grade exams were used to sort out low achievers and select high achievers for acceleration.
- Colleges and universities had stopped teaching about education itself.
- General education for all students had disappeared.
- Funding was tied to academic performance and weighted to support localities with high scores on the sixth grade tests.
- But it was in the year 2003 that the last interdisciplinary unit was taught, the last advisory program was dismantled, and the final exploratory activity was dropped.

These curriculum arrangements had been at the very heart of the middle level school movement of the twentieth century. In them was found its essential meaning. The pendulum had stopped and the bells tolled more slowly. Their ringing was now the death knell for the middle level school.

And so ends our circle two-step, unhappily. But the future is not unattainable—it is not simply something that must inevitably happen to us. We turn now to the second scenario, where we will write our own history in a different way. This scenario has a happy ending.

Scenario 2: A Tarantella*

As we look back now from the year 2017 we can see that it wasn't actually the eleventh hour for middle level schools but it was certainly going on half-past 10.

In the latter part of the 1980s, middle level educators began to see the handwriting on the wall—the pendulum had certainly swung away from their intentions, but instead of nearing the point where it should have begun to swing back, it looked like it would keep going in the same direction.

Like all rescue efforts the key moment was not really the rescue itself. Rather it was when someone noticed the victim was drowning. So it was that a small group of middle level educators realized that their efforts of the past 20 years were beginning to disappear.

With each new turn of the academic rigor trend, a chip was taken from the middle level schools they had constructed. They and their colleagues had been frustrated but the response was usually submission or with-

*In Southern Italy during the 16th and 17th century there was a widespread nervous disease whose main symptom was hysteria. It was believed that this disease, tarentism, could be cured or avoided by performing a particular dance that involved frenzied whirling motion in 6/8 time. The dance was called the tarantella.

drawal.' It was only when frustration turned to anger that they began to resist. The bells still toiled, but their meaning was clear.

At first the talk was directed inside the schools, as usual. How could they convince teachers and administrators that the noteworthy progress of decades was now at risk? How could they get their message to school boards?

It was some time before they realized that in many places these things had happened, but even in those areas middle level schools were feeling the heat. Finally they saw that the way out required that they cover over the school part of the picture and look instead at what was on the outside.

And what they saw was the parents and other citizens, the media, the legislatures, and the early adolescents as they lived their lives outside the schools. If they were to sustain the middle level movement as more student-centered than academic-focused, they must begin to interact with those outside the school.

Middle level talk in the school had gotten them to the present and had produced relatively solidified groups of missionaries for the middle, satisfied participants, and avowed obstructionists. This they could live with and work on. But the pendulum was pushed by ideology and in these days, the ideology was outside the school.

This group realized that the academic hard-liners had built their case outside the school by taking it to the public and the media. They also knew that some local middle level schools had been able to gain commitments from outside groups.

In these cases, the educators did not talk about school—at least not in the beginning. They talked about early adolescents, their characteristics, needs, and problems.

Apparently, support for the school programs came after parents and other citizens understood how those programs were rooted in concerns about their children. Also, it seemed that parents themselves knew little about early adolescents.

These revelations should have come as no surprise to middle level educators, since their efforts to reconstruct the schools had begun with their own re-education about early adolescence.

Looking back, we can only guess that some had forgotten their roots while perhaps others had come in to the movement later when most of the talk was only about school organization.

Whatever the case, this small resistance group began their work by putting together a packaged program for local middle level educators to use when talking to parents and other citizens.

When finished in 1989, this was not the usual monograph about schools. Rather, it was a complete program of audiovisual materials, speech notes, small-group discussion activities, and other devices meant to explain early adolescence, develop sensitivity to youth needs, and improve skills of parents trying to survive this time in their children's lives.

The resistance group had developed political skill since the parent education program was endorsed not only by professional associations concerned with middle level education, but also by other groups including parent-teacher organizations and teacher unions. Moreover, a private foundation had evidently sponsored development and dissemination of the program since it was sent to middle level schools all over the country at no charge.

Sure, the bells still tolled, but their tone had begun to change.

The parenting program was so successful that by 1991, a small book began to appear on shelves in book stores, supermarkets, drug stores, and other outlets. Entitled, *The Parent's Survival Guide: From 10 to 15*, it promoted the same theme: the nature of early adolescence and how adults might live successfully with young people at that stage. The only variation was a small section at the end of that book that suggested what parents should expect from schools for early adolescents.

The language was plain and the message was clear: If you understand early adolescents, you should want these things for your schools.

Not surprisingly, this statement began to show up at meetings between parents and school officials, and the latter were sometimes shocked to hear parents say they wanted the same kind of schools for early adolescents as did middle level educators.

Meanwhile the stage was also being set to solidify the gains made by the middle level movement up to the mid-1980s. The move to push high school courses into the middle level could not be immediately resisted.

Reorganization of subject requirements and their grade placement had come about through legislation and the authors of that reformation were not inclined to quickly reverse their demands. However, even as the first wave of new academic rigor swept over the schools a soft spot in its logic appeared in an increased number of school dropouts.

As expected, the advocates of academic emphasis responded by trying to introduce their platform in the early grades. As a result, elementary schools began to departmentalize their programs and toughen standards for young children.

This proved to be a major blunder for the aficionados

of academic accountability and a window of protest for middle level educators. Parents did not like their children placed in remedial or special education classes, yet the number of students enrolled in both was increasing.

Parents did not like to hear that their children had been denied access to some programs, but this was the case for all but those who scored highest on standardized tests given at the end of elementary school.

Hardly any liked to have their children deprived of a secure and sensitive environment, but this was what departmentalization had done.

While many people seemed to intuitively sense that these things were happening, most said little because educators seemed to go along with them. Of course, what they would soon find out was that not all educators believed in these things.

The Coalition for Early Adolescents and Their Schools' agreed that they would issue statements of protest whenever the advocates of academic emphasis issued one of their dictates.

Because members of the coalition were scattered around the country, editorials began to appear in local newspapers and national outlets decrying the academic push. These emphasized the characteristics and needs of early adolescents as well as descriptions of the kinds of schools appropriate for this developmental stage.

Not only did these editorials begin to mobilize parent interest, they also attracted many elementary educators to the resistance movement.

In time, both the public and the profession could recite the pieces of the early adolescent portrait like litanies memorized in childhood.

In the early months of 1989, the coalition took what would prove to be their most important step. A working conference, co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Middle School Association, was convened to clearly define the role and function of middle level schools.

Papers were presented by pediatricians, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists outlining their fields' views of early adolescents and the impact of modern life on that stage of development.

The message was not unlike that of many middle level educators over the years: the characteristics and needs of early adolescents are rooted in affective concerns and the pursuit of healthy adulthood in later years would depend on the degree to which such concerns could be resolved, beginning in the early stages of adolescence.

The difference here was that this prognosis was made not by middle level educators, but by scholars in those other disciplines.

So, with renewed affirmation, the coalition drafted a statement regarding how middle level schools and their communities could best organize to support the needs of early adolescents.

The inclination to recite and defend school programs already in place was held at bay as coalition members sought to clarify the deeper meaning, the essence of education for early adolescence. The core of the statement rested on the idea that these young people needed a safe and sane environment in which to explore the world seen now through eyes beyond the limits of childhood, but not yet mature enough to focus on the regularities of adulthood.

Thus, the adequate and appropriate education of early adolescents would boil down to 10 elements. Early adolescence is a time for:

1. General education, rather than narrow specialization.
2. Exciting and engaging activities, not passive assimilation of information.
3. Exploration of ideas, not regurgitation of trivialities.
4. Learning to cooperate with others, not compete against them.
5. Trying out self-identities, not being forced to conform.
6. Actively exploring values and alternative beliefs, not for narrow indoctrination.
7. Finding unity and wholeness, not for reduction and fragmentation.
8. Beginning independence and making mistakes, not sudden induction into adulthood.
9. Understanding the transition from childhood to adolescence, not being isolated from the personal past and future.
10. Resolving the issues of early adolescence, not simply preparing for adolescence and adulthood.

According to the coalition, these 10 statements were not made to prescribe particular features of schools, but to set out guidelines that society should use to frame policies for educating early adolescents.

Indeed, throughout the report the authors carefully avoided naming particular pieces of middle level schools. They knew that it did not make sense to go from one set of dictates to another.

Also, they sensed that at times the middle level movement had come dangerously close to organizational ultimatums even within its own ranks and that this caused some to seek only organizational innovation without understanding the deeper meaning of institutional reconstruction.

For these people, mandates of academic emphasis were only a debate over form, of one pattern over an-

other. This meant that they also did not see that the commitment of the middle level movement was larger than the school, that it was an advocacy movement for early adolescence in the society as a whole.

The final section of the coalition report was a stroke of unusual insight and it proved to be the piece that eventually attracted attention. In the significant episodes of legal and legislative progressive reform, rulings spelled out what could not be done and left open the door on how to do what should be done.

For example, the Supreme Court ruled that schools could not be segregated, but did not specify the exact form for their integration. So, while avoiding organizational prescriptions, the report suggested several patterns that should *not* be present if the educational form for early adolescents was to be in line with the 10 elements previously described. Middle level schools should *not*:

1. Be organized around a separate subject, departmentalized approach.
2. Place academic pursuits in higher priority than affective concerns.
3. Persistently isolate early adolescents from those younger and older than themselves.
4. Fill the learner's day with a succession of separate classes, each taught by a different teacher.
5. Require long periods of passive behavior during the day.
6. Set out extensive lists of rules and regulations that defy the variability in early adolescent behavior.
7. Avoid personal and social concerns or needs of early adolescents.
8. Exclude early adolescents from extending learning into their communities.
9. Be forced to employ teachers who have narrow interests or academic specialties.
10. Be subjected to curriculum mandates or special interests aimed at forming or reforming the high school.
11. Deter early adolescents from exploring a broad range of personal interests.
12. Force early adolescents to defer attempts at independence.
13. Force early adolescents to compete against one another for rewards or recognition.
14. Group learners on the basis of intelligence or standardized test scores.
15. Be expected to solve problems of youth without active engagement with other community agencies.
16. All look the same.

In short, the coalition spoke to the characteristics of early adolescents, described guidelines for their appropriate education, and while spelling out what the middle level school should not be, left open the door for exploring diverse patterns for institutional and curriculum organization.

In the last statement of the report, the coalition wore its heart on its sleeve for both educators and citizens to see: "Early adolescents must have experiences with all kinds of people, but especially with adults who are willing to take a stand on what is worth doing, worth having, worth knowing, and worth caring about."

The bells still tolled, but their tone had now decidedly changed.

The coalition report was completed in 1990 under the title, *Making Good Schools for Early Adolescents*. During the next year it was endorsed by nearly every association connected with schools, as well as those concerned with medicine, psychology, and sociology.

Finally, in 1992, it was publicly introduced as a rising tide of concern about the place of youth and their future in our society. Copies were sent to school districts all over the country and hand delivered to elected federal and state officials by persons of status within their constituencies.

By 1993 well over half of the state legislatures were discussing the report's content and some had already directed their state departments of education to explain how curriculum and institutional mandates could be eased to avoid the list of "should nots" and promote continuation of local efforts to move the middle level movement along.

By 1995 most states had enacted "enabling legislation" to empower this movement to seek appropriate and diverse models for middle level schools and to involve other community agencies in advocacy for early adolescents.

An interesting sidelight to these developments was the clear message they sent to those who had tried to push academic rigor into the elementary schools: the excuse of having to prepare children for the harsh world of the middle level school was gone. There could be no reason to avoid developing early grade patterns that functioned on behalf of children and their needs.

And by 1998 even some high schools had begun to rethink their role in the education of adolescents and the balance between affective and academic programs.

As we now view the scene in the year 2017, we can see one other result of the original resistance to the academic rigor trend of the 1980s.

Those people who had experienced the kinds of middle level schools that emerged in the 1970s and '80s now have early adolescents of their own. The legislation of the 1990s and the work that had followed it are certainly still useful, but the place of good and appropriate schools for early adolescents is now secured by

the expectations of parents.

The Coalition for Early Adolescents and Their Schools was eventually disbanded. However, from its actions in that episode of resistance a lesson had been learned.

In social behavior, unlike in physics, the pendulum is propelled by ideology. Without public reminders of alternative ideas, those in fashion may become permanent style. If the pendulum should swing again, someone must give it a push.

And in offering this lesson, the middle level movement, which was surely one of the most important chapters in twentieth century education, was saved.

The bells still toll, but their ringing now sounds more like a celebration.

A Final Word: After the Ball Is Over

This little dance to the music of time was meant only to lay out in broad strokes the possibilities for the near future of the middle level school movement.

Events and dates are not intended to have predictive accuracy or to represent the range of possible events. Instead they are meant to say that the great gains of the middle level movement during the past few decades are now at risk.

We are in a time when the wave of academic reforms threatens to wash away the inroads that movement has made toward making middle level schools that are good for early adolescents. All of us can see the benefits of the recent past, though none of us would say our work is done.

Surely we realize that middle level schools have been on a path toward improvement, but also are reminded every day of how many there are within the middle level who still have not joined in this important development. Certainly we must keep chipping away at their resistance. But we are now compelled to turn our attention outward to the larger educational arena where the stakes are growing and the price gets higher.

The lever we have used to move the middle level schools must now be long enough to tilt the thinking of others away from their obsession with academic content and test scores and toward the needs of youth.

So far we have heard little from the one side that differs from the other with regard to the present trend in thinking about what schools are for. And even if the tune changes, what is to guarantee that it will not change once again?

Whatever the case, in the days and years ahead we must keep in mind several crucial ideas.

- The middle level movement means more than administrative or structural reorganization. It represents a struggle to build advocacy in the society-at-large for early adolescents and re-make the school curriculum in ways that are good and just for these young people. Its rhetoric must apply both inside and outside the school (especially the latter since sustained reform cannot exist without external support). If these things are not so, then is the struggle really worth the effort?
- We may promote school diversity on some issues, but cannot condone it on others. We do not have to be as kind to institutional psyches as we must to those of early adolescents. Too often we hear the clarion call, as if to deny the need for substantive change—"we are not asking you to do anything different from before, only to try a little reorganization."

If real reform is needed this rhetoric will not prevent eventual conflict. Rather it allows the possibility for no real change or eventual, embarrassing reminders of earlier promises. Regression is easier than progression, and usually faster.

- Talk about early adolescents brought us down the road this far and it would probably get us farther. School program talk, especially in public, probably won't. However, statements or ideas that detract from good middle level theory and practice should not go unanswered.
- The middle level movement is neither solid nor stable enough to forego passion. The missionary flavor of earlier days has dissipated as our ideas have matured. We need now the kind of ingenuity and boldness of the movement's pioneers. We must do some restoration work on the vision.
- Finally, the middle level movement need not go the way of the dinosaur. It is possible to take action to secure its continuation. It would of course be sad to see that action come to no avail, but even sadder if it was never taken.

When you do a little dance to the music of time, someone must pay the piper. And usually, whoever pays the piper gets to call the tune.

Part 2

Middle Level Schools:
Programs and Curriculum

Middle Level Schools:

A

Programs

The search for more responsive middle level school structures and programs during the 1980s prompted many middle level educators to reexamine current practices. As a result, new emphasis was placed on teaching teams, guidance, grouping practices, and student activities.

This section focuses on the various organizational structures and program options middle level educators have used during the last decade to make their schools more developmentally responsive.

Interdisciplinary Teaming

Interdisciplinary teaming, according to Sally Clark and Donald Clark in *Interdisciplinary Teaming Programs: Organization, Rationale, and Implementation*, is the foundation on which most successful middle level programs are built. While not a new concept, teaming offers many advantages for both teachers and students—advantages that include greater flexibility of time, potential for content integration, support systems for both teachers and students, and greater autonomy in decision making.

In examining the organization of interdisciplinary teams, Clark and Clark give specific suggestions for implementing teaming in middle level schools. Both advantages and disadvantages are discussed.

Implementation requires a major commitment from teachers, administrators, parents, school boards, and central office administrators. Clark and Clark believe a deep commitment to interdisciplinary teaming results when everyone involved has had the opportunity to study and plan and everyone has the autonomy to make the necessary decisions about organization, implementation, and operation.

John Winton, in *Interdisciplinary Studies at the Shelburne Middle School*, provides a unique example of interdisciplinary teaming in a smaller school. Organized around exploratory experiences and a central theme, the interdisciplinary studies program involves all the school's teachers and facilitates cross-age groupings of early adolescents.

Winton reports that the major topic areas of technology, humanities, and communications were identified by the teachers and developed during a summer workshop. The interdisciplinary studies, according to Winton, supplement and reinforce, not supplant regular instruction. Program emphasis is as much on student behavior as content.

Winton says the advantages of Shelburne's program, include renewed teacher energy and ex-

citement, teachers more appreciative of talents of other teachers, younger and older students working together effectively, and less competition and more cooperation in multi-age groupings.

Teacher-Adviser Programs

Teacher-adviser guidance programs is the topic of Gordon Vars' *Getting Closer to Middle Level Students: Options for Teacher-Adviser Programs*. Vars believes schools can ensure that each student in the school has at least one "adult who knows him or her well."

Small group advisory programs have several advantages, according to Vars, including: the provision for a more intimate environment, involvement of all staff members, demonstration of a high commitment to guidance, and incorporation of guidance into the regular curriculum.

Disadvantages of this type of program center around teachers who are incapable or unwilling to participate, scheduling problems, guidance as an isolated single period during the day, and administration and coordination of programs such as updating activities and staff development support.

The other alternative suggested by Vars is the extended time advisory program. By increasing the amount of time that a particular group of students spends with a teacher (block time, modified self-contained program), the guidance function is limited to fewer teachers, and teachers and students have fewer persons with whom to interact every day. In this type of program, Vars claims teachers see students in a variety of situations for greater periods of time, thus enhancing the possibility of having time to talk individually with students.

The disadvantages of this type of guidance program are linked partly to the demands placed on the teacher to be both instructor and adviser. Class sizes are often too large, and the pressure to cover subject matter may overpower the need to set aside time for guidance.

Both of these programs offer viable options for providing guidance to early adolescents. Vars concludes the article by emphasizing the importance of using a variety of approaches to guidance, by reiterating that guidance should permeate the entire school, and by acknowledging that the success of any program rests squarely on the competence and commitment of staff.

The Middle School Transition

Guidance also serves an important function in assisting early adolescents to make successful transitions into and out of middle level schools. Edward Brazee, in *Moving Into and Out of the Middle Level School*, addresses the need for an organized and systematic plan to meet the transition needs of students moving from elementary to middle level schools and from middle level school to high school.

He believes students often face different philosophies, procedures, requirements, rewards, and problems. This is often a problem because teachers have little knowledge about the environments from which their students come.

Brazee contends that middle level schools should take the responsibility for planning and implementing transition programs because middle level schools have the most to gain or lose.

He suggests that a transition panel be created to consider the purpose of the program, middle level philosophy and practice, the principal's role, the development of well-planned, well-organized activities, and the extent of student involvement.

Brazee concludes the article by identifying some specific programs and activities schools can use to help early adolescents make successful transitions into and out of middle level schools.

Students with Special Needs

All early adolescents need effective guidance programs to help them make successful transitions. In *Helping Middle Level Early Adolescents from Broken Homes*, Robert Allers points out that effective guidance is particularly important to children from broken homes.

For many students, Allers contends, the desire to achieve at school is hampered by experiences at home. Trained or not, teachers of early adolescents must do a better job of addressing the emotional needs of students before they can address their educational needs.

Allers states that while research on divorce is still in its infancy, it suggests that children of divorced parents often exhibit proportionally more anxiety

and restlessness, are often preoccupied with family changes, have difficulty attending to tasks, and often daydream and become depressed. He also discusses why parents, friends, relatives, and neighbors may not be able to offer adequate support systems.

Educators can offer compassion, concern, and emotional support, according to Allers. Educators also must be sensitive to signs of stress in their students. Middle level administrators must ensure that parents are part of the students' educational program; promote programs that teach early adolescents about divorce; establish support groups where peer counseling might take place; and schedule inservice for staff members.

Student Grouping

Grouping practices emerged as another major middle level issue during the 1980s. Conrad Toepfer, in *Heterogeneous Grouping in Middle Level Schools: Leadership Responsibilities for Principals*, points out that the fundamental purpose of grouping should be to place students in settings that best meet their learning needs. He believes that subgrouping on the basis of ability, achievement, or interest within classes in a specific area is more justifiable than grouping on the basis of general intelligence.

Many different criteria for determining pupil learning capacities should be utilized and the merits of ability, achievement, and interest must be clearly defined as they relate to grouping needs.

Toepfer draws from the work of George, Johnston and Markle, and Slavin, and the recommendations of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, in discussing the case against homogeneous grouping and tracking practices. He offers suggestions as to how middle level principals can successfully implement heterogeneous grouping arrangements.

He also stresses the importance of taking the time to develop specific staff development/inservice experiences that provide educators with the needed skills. Principals must provide the leadership to enable staff members to gain the necessary skills to successfully implement more heterogeneously grouped arrangements and to use strategies such as cooperative learning.

The Gifted and Talented

Middle level schools continue to wrestle with grouping issues. While tracking of students remains a major concern, the issue of special educational programs for gifted and talented students has become most controversial. In dealing with the issues of gifted and talented education at the middle level, Conrad Toepfer, in *Planning Gifted/Talented Middle Level School Programs: Issues and Guidelines*, cautions that programs must not overlook the developmental factors common to all youngsters between 10 and 14.

He identifies and discusses special problems and concerns about gifted and talented programs at the middle level, including: cognitive expectations and affective outcomes; IQ and thinking levels; pressures on students to achieve; ability grouping; and planning programs that are developmentally responsive and maximize each student's special abilities.

In concluding the article, Toepfer writes about the importance of identifying the degree to which an approach matches the goals for responsive middle level education and the importance of the principal in working with the staff to organize gifted and talented programs that respond to and build on special abilities, talents, and interests of middle level youngsters.

Linda Kramer, in *The Ability/Achievement Dilemma of Gifted Middle Level Girls*, examines gifted education from another perspective. Presenting data from a study of gifted girls' experiences in one middle level school in which they were members of heterogeneous teams and a pull-out gifted program, Kramer describes how girls defined ability and the relationships among the girls and their team teachers.

Teachers' negative perceptions regarding gifted students and the program are discussed. Kramer found that these girls' beliefs about ability and achievement centered on getting the right answer and whether the teacher likes you. Both lead to specific classroom behavior.

Kramer contends that when the concept of giftedness is not clearly understood, it may limit girls' potential achievement, particularly when the teacher believes giftedness means excellent performance combined with a focus on one right answer or a single correct way.

In concluding the article, Kramer stresses the need to more clearly understand what is implied by "gifted" and the importance of examining the school's gifted program, its effect on other school programs, as well as ways in which gifted program goals should be integrated into the regular classroom.

Athletic Competition

In the concluding article in this section, *Interscholastic Athletics and Middle Level Education: To Have Or Not To Have*, Conrad Toepfer contends that the continuing debate of interscholastic athletics versus intramural sports has polarized many middle level educators, thus sidetracking educators from the real issues of competitive sports.

Toepfer says the real issue should be the appropriateness of the competition. The consideration of effective competition, he says, should be addressed as middle level educators plan school programs. He identifies five areas of concern:

1. Emphasis in middle grade athletics distinct and separate from other athletic interests
2. Broad, intramural opportunities for middle level students in competitive sports
3. Interscholastic competition for the talented elite in the middle grades
4. Instructional concerns in the total athletic program
5. Role of athletics in terms of the developmental needs of middle grade youngsters.

Toepfer provides data from schools and school districts in six different states that show that the number of middle level interscholastic football and basketball players who continue to succeed in their high school performance is very low. Toepfer concludes by cautioning that, as with any other component of middle level education, an athletic program must not lose sight of the need to help students gain the most from their middle level experience.

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Interdisciplinary Teaming Programs: Organization, Rationale, and Implementation

By Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark

Interdisciplinary teaching programs are the foundation on which most successful middle level programs are built.

Teaming arrangements can be traced as far back as the Eight Year Study 1933-1941. However, it was not until the early 1960s that teaming became a viable staffing and instructional program through the work of such educators as J. Lloyd Trump and Lloyd Michael of the Commission on the Experimental Study of the Utilization of the Staff in the Secondary School.

In the late 1960s, at the same time Alexander and Eichhorn were writing major books on middle level schools, William Georgiades was expanding the concept of team teaching to include block scheduling, flexible grouping, and integration of subject matter. This interdisciplinary teaming approach, called the Pontoon Transitional Design, was widely implemented in many middle level schools and high schools. It also was to become an integral part of the NASSP Model Schools Project.

The work of Paul George and others led to the further refinement of teaming arrangements to include what George describes as interdisciplinary teaming organizations, a concept that broadens teaming beyond the concept of just team teaching (George, 1983).

Organization of Interdisciplinary Teaming

Teaming has typically been described as two or more teachers from different subject areas working together to plan, instruct, and evaluate groups of students in two or more classrooms while using a variety of instructional strategies and learning resources in large group, small group, and directed study settings.

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Alexander and George (1981), describe interdisciplinary teaming as being organized sharing—teachers on the team share the same students, the same areas of the school (when possible), and the same schedule. George (1983) states:

> An interdisciplinary team is . . . a group of teachers, usually from two to five persons representing the basic academic subjects, who share the same students, the same space, and the same schedule. On some teams teachers may share the responsibility for teaching the basic subjects in some form of team teaching, but frequently this is not the case. More often, teachers on teams share an interest in the total academic program in which their common students are involved.

Georgiades' model for interdisciplinary teaming focused on flexibility of scheduling and team teaching.

Organization. Although no two schools organize interdisciplinary teams in the same way, teams are most commonly organized around the required or core subjects of the middle level curriculum.

In some instances, the core subjects are grouped back-to-back so that the team members have the flexibility of a large block of time. This interdisciplinary organization includes teachers from three or four subject areas who are assigned approximately 90-120 students.

Other team organizations may include two teachers who are each responsible for instruction in two subject areas. Within one school it is not uncommon to find teams with different numbers of teachers and different subject level combinations.

While interdisciplinary teams can be organized in

several ways, Alexander and George (1981) suggest some criteria for team structure. The term interdisciplinary teaming organizations is used to describe:

> . . . a way of organizing faculty so that a group of teachers share (1) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum in more than one academic area; (2) the same group of students; (3) the same schedule; and (4) the same area of the building.

Interdisciplinary teams usually consist of two to five teachers. Some schools, however, have organized teams that include as many as 12 to 15 teachers. These schools are usually structured around "school-within-a-school" or "house" programs.

While there is no ideal team size, teams of two or four teachers are much more manageable.

When too many persons become part of a team, it becomes more difficult to manage the logistics of planning, scheduling, and grouping; content integration; and facilities use.

Interdisciplinary Teaming vs. Team Teaching. Team teaching is defined as two or more teachers working together in classroom settings to facilitate student learning. Many interdisciplinary teams do not incorporate team teaching into their instructional strategies. The emphasis of the team is more on planning, sharing of ideas, grouping students for instruction, evaluation, and integration of content.

Interdisciplinary teaching programs are the foundation on which most successful middle level programs are built.

In both concepts, team planning is a major factor and the option to team teach is available at the discretion of the team members.

The major difference between the two is the emphasis that is placed on team teaching as a strategy to increase the variety and flexibility of instruction.

Interdisciplinary teams that plan to include team teaching as an instructional component usually organize their instruction around three modes: large group, small group, and directed study. When teachers use appropriate strategies for each of these modes, instruction becomes flexible and provides numerous opportunities for a variety of experiences including personalized instruction.

Establishing Interdisciplinary Teaming. Interdisciplinary teaming, in its initial stages, has very little effect on the existing schedule. As teachers and administrators in a school become more adept with the operation of teams, they often make significant changes in the schedule.

Most interdisciplinary teams are scheduled in multiple period time blocks. This affords team members the opportunity of scheduling instruction to best meet the individual learning needs of their students. These multi-period blocks can usually be incorporated into the regular school schedule.

Those responsible for the master schedule and the actual scheduling of students should use the following criteria:

- The same students must be assigned to the same group of team teachers.
- Teachers and students in interdisciplinary teams should be scheduled in back-to-back periods giving them large blocks of time to manipulate for instructional purposes.
- Students should be scheduled into the team heterogeneously. Teachers should be given the responsibility for student grouping within the parameters of each interdisciplinary team.
- Members of each interdisciplinary team *must* have the same planning period.

Subject Matter Content. In most cases interdisciplinary teaming has a positive influence on the existing subject matter content. The concept aids team members working to plan, organize, and integrate subject matter and learning experiences in ways appropriate for early adolescents.

Specific subject matter instruction is enhanced by having subject specialists teaching in their areas of expertise and by having subject specialists from several content areas cooperate and integrate content and instruction.

New interdisciplinary teams must move cautiously as they begin to examine ways in which content can be integrated. Before any integration can take place, each subject specialist on the team must know the yearly content objectives for his or her subject area. These objectives should be in written form before any attempts are made to integrate content.

Once content objectives for each subject are well-defined, subject integration can begin. Team members should not expect to integrate all the concepts in the respective subject areas. Rather, team members should examine the content and look at areas that are easily integrated.

Efforts should then be made to make instruction in those first integrated units fun for the students. As

teams work together and become more acquainted with each other's content, integration will more naturally occur.

Typical Team Tasks. For teachers on interdisciplinary teams to work effectively to create learning experiences responsive to the needs of early adolescents, certain basic tasks must be accomplished.

These tasks, which are in many ways similar to those most teachers do on an individual basis, must be done as a team. Typical team tasks include:

- Establish procedures for classroom management practices (i.e., rules and regulations, homework, attendance and tardies, discipline, etc.)
- Develop policies and practices for student grouping within the team
- Develop schedules and establish assignments that will provide equal opportunities for flexibility of time, group size, and teaching load for each of the teachers on the team
- Identify areas (facilities) appropriate for large group instruction (i.e., films, guest speakers, etc.)
- Examine course content and look for possible ways to integrate subject matter
- Establish uniform grading and evaluation systems.

Teacher Involvement in Teaming. All the teachers are not necessarily members of interdisciplinary teams. Some schools involve only the core subject teachers (math, science, social studies, and language arts) on teams.

Not all teachers are comfortable in teaming situations. As long as these teachers are responsive to the needs of their students, they should be given the opportunity of teaching within the traditional schedule. This offers additional flexibility for placing students in those learning situations that best meet their individual needs.

Rationale for Interdisciplinary Teaming

One of the major functions of the middle level school is to provide early adolescents with a responsive educational program that will ease the transitions from childhood to young adulthood and from elementary school to high school.

The interdisciplinary team structure provides a bridge between the self-contained class of the elementary school and the single-subject curriculum of the high school (Alexander and George, 1981).

Teams provide for smaller focus groups as recommended by Lipsitz (1984) in her study of successful middle level schools. These focus groups help provide a sense of identity for students.

Teams also provide for better use of staff, mechanisms for dealing with more diversified populations, procedures for greater variety of educational experiences, and opportunities for personalized instruction (Clark and Clark, 1974; Georgiades, 1974; and Wiles and Bondi, 1981).

The Advantages for Teachers. One of the major advantages to teachers of interdisciplinary teaming is that the plan reduces the sense of isolation common in many middle level schools. The team organization helps teachers work together to solve common instructional problems and to jointly focus on students with special learning or behavior problems.

Team members also have the advantage of flexibility of time within their assigned blocks and the ability to group in ways that they believe are most appropriate. Other advantages include a support system among team members that encourages innovation and the provision for professional autonomy and decision making about instructional and organizational issues.

The Advantages for Students. The interdisciplinary team provides students with greater attention to their individual needs, specialized grouping according to needs and interests, and greater opportunities for independent learning and building responsibility.

Students also have the advantage of having a team of professionals who are working together to diagnose, instruct, and nurture each student in a warm, supportive instructional climate.

Some Disadvantages. While the advantages of interdisciplinary teaming far outweigh the disadvantages, some potential problems must be addressed.

- Teaming is a social enterprise. Successful teams are built around teachers who are skilled in human relations, planning, and decision making. When these skills are not present, the effectiveness of the team may be severely damaged.
- Effective interdisciplinary teams are built around teachers who like each other, work well together, and share like "beliefs" about the instruction of early adolescents. One of the major reasons teams fail is the lack of compatibility of team members.
- Interdisciplinary teaming programs involve change, and some teachers in every middle level school will resist change. Some teachers prize their autonomy and will resist any attempt to involve them in collaborative efforts with other teachers. Teachers who see themselves as rigorous content specialists often resist teaming because they view it as a "watering down" of academic standards. Resis-

tance may also come from teachers who do not have good social, planning, or decision-making skills.

- Interdisciplinary teaming takes more teacher planning time. Team members who are still responsible for the instructional management of their content area classes must also allocate additional time for team planning. This additional time requirement should be recognized at the time the concept of interdisciplinary teaming is introduced in the middle level school. While some teachers will initially view this new time requirement as a burden, they will soon come to value this time with their colleagues.

Implementing Interdisciplinary Teaming Programs

Getting a School Ready for Interdisciplinary Teaming. To implement successful interdisciplinary teaming programs in their schools, administrators must be knowledgeable about every aspect of teaming, including team organization, rationale, scheduling, social dynamics, content integration, and evaluation.

Principals must also be knowledgeable in the areas of change process and staff development. Informed leadership is crucial to the success of interdisciplinary teaming programs.

An important first step in implementing teaming programs is establishing a warm supportive climate that will facilitate change. An atmosphere that is centered around mutual support and trust, collegial planning, and involvement in decision making is the basis on which successful new programs are built.

Steps principals can take to build a positive change climate include (Clark and Clark, 1974; 1981):

1. Exploration/Awareness
2. Information
3. Motivation
4. Identification and Commitment

Successful principals use many strategies during the exploration/awareness and information stages, including providing articles and media to teachers about interdisciplinary teaming (seed planting), scheduling discussion sessions that focus on school improvement, establishing study groups responsible for investigating and reporting on successful middle level programs, hiring speakers and consultants, and arranging school visitations and conference attendance.

The information gained about middle level schools and interdisciplinary teaming will "spark" an interest in many teachers.

The degree to which teachers are motivated to participate in teaming will be influenced by the degree that they perceive the change as:

- More effective than what they are currently doing
- Compatible with their value system
- Not too complex to learn and implement
- Tryable on a small scale with low visibility
- Offering high visibility and recognition if successful.

Interdisciplinary teaming meets all five of these criteria.

When the administration involves teachers in the planning process, it is much easier to identify team participants, to secure commitment, and to organize interdisciplinary teams. As a result of their involvement in investigating interdisciplinary teaming, many teachers are convinced of the relative advantages of teaming organizations and are the first to volunteer to participate.

For the most part the teachers who initially volunteer to participate are those teachers who are recognized as being the better, more committed teachers in the school. These are the kinds of teachers who will make the effort to ensure team success.

Parents and community members should be involved in the climate-building process. Parents in particular have many concerns about early adolescents and the new educational programs implemented in many middle level schools.

Their involvement in planning and staff development will lead to a better understanding of early adolescents and middle level education. In most cases parents and community members involved in planning become strong supporters of the middle level concept.

Principals must also be knowledgeable in the areas of change process and staff development.

Administrators must play a strong role in organizing a viable staff development program. The staff development should focus narrowly on the specific tasks and skills needed by teachers and administrators to successfully implement and maintain interdisciplinary teaming programs.

The principal must take an aggressive role in securing the resources necessary to support a comprehensive program. It is incumbent on any school board that mandates the reorganization of middle level schools to also provide the resources necessary for staff development.

Information Teachers Need. Middle level teachers considering implementing interdisciplinary teaming in their schools must have the following kinds of information:

- Advantages and disadvantages of interdisciplinary teaming
- Variety of ways that teams can be organized in their schools
- The effect that teaming will have on teaching loads, planning time, scheduling, and content organization
- Specific ways that interdisciplinary teaming can improve the quality of student learning and faculty working conditions
- Examples of schools that have been successful with interdisciplinary teaming
- The extent of support available for staff development, planning, resource materials, school visitations, and conference attendance.

The principal must help teachers obtain the needed information about interdisciplinary teaming. In addition to organizing study and discussion groups and inservice sessions, principals can provide:

- Magazine articles, monographs, and books
- Films, videotapes, and audiocassettes
- Opportunities to visit schools with successful programs
- Funds to attend local and regional conferences

Decisions Prior to Implementation of Interdisciplinary Teaming Programs. Prior to implementation of the interdisciplinary teaming program, all persons who will be participating in the teaming program should be involved in making the following decisions:

- Who will be involved in the initial teams and how will they be identified. The first teams should be built around teachers who have a real commitment to teaming.
- How many teams will be organized the first year of implementation. Most schools do not involve all staff members in teaming the first year.
- What subjects/content areas and activities will be included in each teaming unit. All teams do not have to be uniform, but to facilitate implementation, decisions must be made about the specific subjects to be included in each team.
- How long the blocks of time will be for each team and how team planning time will be scheduled. The amount of instructional time needed for each team may vary depending upon the number of teachers and subject areas included in each team. All members of each team should have the same time scheduled for planning.
- How many students will be scheduled into each team and how these students will be grouped. The number of students in each team is usually determined by the number of teachers assigned to each team times the class size ratio. Students should be assigned to each team heterogeneously; grouping for instruction should be the decision of the team members.
- How facilities will be scheduled to maximize convenience of use for team members. Consideration must be given to reassignment of rooms so that team members will have proximity.

Evaluating Interdisciplinary Teams. The rationale for interdisciplinary teaming programs should serve as the basis for evaluation. Evaluation should therefore answer the following questions:

- What effect has interdisciplinary teaming had on student behavior, self-concept, and achievement?
- How has interdisciplinary teaming affected the transition process from elementary to high school?
- To what extent has teaming reduced the feeling of isolation among teachers and students and contributed to positive school climate?
- To what extent are teachers in this school involved in and supportive of interdisciplinary teaming?
- How are teams functioning in this school (i.e., equitable distribution of responsibilities, planning, decision making, and social skills)?
- To what extent has content been integrated and are teachers team teaching?
- After being involved in interdisciplinary teaming what do teachers perceive as advantages and disadvantages? What changes should be made?
- What are the perceptions of parents and community members?
- What are the students' perceptions?

In the initial stages of implementation of interdisciplinary teaming programs, evaluation should be informal. The focus should be on the mechanics of teaming such as planning, scheduling, problem solving, and decision making. Feedback should be nonthreatening and offered in terms of suggestions for improving team functioning.

As teams begin to function more effectively, steps can be taken to utilize more formal evaluative procedures.

Summary

The implementation of effective interdisciplinary teaming programs in a middle level school is a major undertaking. John Lounsbury (1987) summarizes it well:

> . . . the shift to fully install interdisciplinary teams, exploit their potential, and actually teach as a team is a major one not readily accomplished. Readjustments in traditional roles for both students and teachers are called for, old plans no longer can be relied on, diverse materials are needed, and even the basis for assignments and evaluation are altered. In short, middle level schools and teachers need assistance in making fully operational the almost universally advocated interdisciplinary approach to instruction.

The development of successful interdisciplinary teams requires commitment from teachers, administrators, and parents who are determined to improve the quality of their middle level schools. It requires a commitment from school boards and central office administrators to support planning and implementation.

Most of all, successful teaming requires the kind of deep commitment that comes only when teachers, parents, and principals have the opportunity to study and plan and are given the autonomy to make the decisions that will determine the organization of interdisciplinary teams in their schools.

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OCTOBER 1988

Interdisciplinary Studies at the Shelburne Middle School

By John J. Winton

Shelburne (Vt.) Middle School, which embraces grades five through eight, was organized 21 years ago and serves 330 students with a program that has included teaching teams, a non-traditional progress reporting system, a multi-age alternative program, and a strong belief in the need for activities designed around the unique characteristics of early adolescents.

Like many schools across the United States, Shelburne experienced a reduction in student enrollment and is just now beginning to realize slight increases once again.

When the reduction in student enrollment resulted in a loss of some staff members and subsequent compromises with the organization of team teaching and other middle school practices, the faculty members felt a sense of loss and began to search for ways to recapture some of the program features that were more in keeping with good middle school philosophy.

This search coincided with the beginnings of a self-study connected with a formal evaluation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Part of that process requires the school staff members to reexamine school philosophy and goals.

One of the topics explored in the self-study was interdisciplinary studies. Some faculty members had had good experiences with their attempts at interdisciplinary units and were eager to find other teachers with whom they could collaborate. As a result, six or eight staff members and the principal met to explore the possibilities. Other school personnel who were not involved in the discussion group were involved through regularly scheduled faculty meetings.

With the enthusiasm of the original discussion group as a strong motivating factor, several staff members expressed a willingness to explore the possibilities of interdisciplinaries and the original group was asked to outline a plan. They did so at meetings during a two-month period before school.

The Principal's Role in Planning, Implementation

The principal's role in bringing about interdisciplinary studies included lending support and encouragement to teachers who had a special interest in the program. The early morning meetings were facilitated by the principal,

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who also provided suggestions based on middle school philosophy and examples of various scheduling patterns.

The principal also kept the school directors informed of developments and enlisted their support for the project, which included financial commitment to employ the entire teaching staff for two days of preparation prior to the start of the 1987-88 school year. The board also provided one such paid day before school started in September 1988.

The Shelburne School directors organized a Key Communicators committee that serves as a community sounding board. The communicators are community members who, by nature of their activities, frequently come in contact with Shelburne residents. They volunteer to meet with the school directors four times a year to hear about school projects and to help the directors understand how school matters are being perceived by the public.

The principal kept this group informed of the move toward interdisciplinary studies so they would have accurate information should questions be raised in the community.

Early in the school year, the principal made a presentation to the Shelburne Parent-Teacher Organization to explain the purpose of interdisciplinary studies and the changes that would result in the school program. In addition, school newsletters and the local media carried stories about the interdisciplinaries and kept the community informed about some of the activities.

The Interdisciplinary Plan

The plan provided for the inclusion of all students and faculty members in the interdisciplinary studies program. It called for "blocks of time" in the schedule when the whole school would concentrate on interdisciplinary activities. It also called for time for interdisciplinary team members to plan. The principal and some teachers then devised a schedule for the 1987-88 school year that included time for interdisciplinaries.

Most interdisciplinary activities in middle schools across the country take the form of short-term units of several days or a week that may involve individual classes, teams, or sometimes the whole school. Typical concentration for the units might be a period in history, a section of the country, or works of literature around which teachers from a variety of disciplines integrate their special talents to provide a common experience for students. The experience gives students an opportunity to see the interrelationships that exist among the various disciplines.

The Shelburne faculty members were divided intr three interdisciplinary teams, each with a special identity. Each team elects a coordinator from its members. This is a paid, year-long position so leadership opportunities can be available to more staff members. No rule restricts a coordinator from serving successive terms if the team members agree. Coordinators organize and moderate team meetings, prepare budget requests, arrange schedules for facilities or resources, etc.

For the 1987-88 school year, the theme for all interdisciplinary teams was "A Limited Earth." Each of the teaching teams planned its activities around this theme and approached it from the perspective of technology, the humanities, and communications.

Most interdisciplinary activities in middle schools across the country take the form of short-term units of several days or a week that may involve individual classes, teams, or sometimes the whole school.

The teams meet with students each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 12:15 to 1:55. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons are devoted to electives.

The Technology Team is made up of teachers from mathematics, science, practical (industrial) arts, living arts (home economics), and from the fifth grade.

This team challenged its students to research and analyze the options available to the residents of Shelburne for a source of energy to be recommended for town use in the year 2000. Among the resulting activities was an energy fair at which students displayed projects that illustrate energy production.

Students learned to distinguish between renewable and non-renewable resources, to judge the environmental impact of the use of particular resources, and to analyze the costs involved in energy production. Fifth and sixth graders presented their projects to the seventh and eighth graders, and vice versa.

The 12-week Technology Team activities culminated in a formal debate at which the seventh and eighth graders in small groups championed one source of energy or

another to recommend to the community for the future. The fifth and sixth grade audience judged the competition.

The Humanities Team, which draws its members from social studies, language arts, art, music, physical education, and the fifth grade, compared life in Vermont with life in China and explored the similarities and differences in those cultures.

The Communications Team includes representatives from language arts, foreign language, typing, math, physical education, and from the fifth grade. Team members investigated the various means by which people communicate with one another and disseminate information locally and worldwide.

The main thrust of the Communications Team last year was for students to understand that languages are types of codes and that persons who know the codes can communicate. Early in the 12-week period the students in the Communications Team were organized into groups of four. They could choose the composition of their teams but had to include at least two fifth or sixth graders and two seventh or eighth graders.

Each team was directed to devise two codes using any system they chose, but they could not use conventional letters from the English alphabet. Periodically the groups were given time to practice their codes to ensure that each member understood them.

At the end of the 12 weeks, the entire Communications Team met in the gymnasium for a competition called Message Master.

Each of five teams at a time was assigned a "lane," which consisted of three hula hoops spaced about 10 feet from each other across the gym floor. Team members stood in the hoops and once stationed there, could not leave.

At a signal, the student or students in the first hula hoop were given a message written in English that they had to convert to one of their codes. The coded message was then "transmitted" to the second hula hoop by whatever means the team chose. The message had to be safely received at the second hoop without the occupant of that hoop leaving the area within the hoop.

Some ingenious means of transmission were used, including hand signals, ropes thrown across to pull the message over, skateboards pushed across, and balls with the message attached thrown over.

At the second hoop the message had to be decoded and encoded in the second code devised by the team. Again it was transmitted, this time to the third hoop where it was decoded and presented in written English to a teacher.

The team that completed the relay first and with accuracy was the winner.

The Goal: Effective Learning

Each day ends with a period (1:55 to 2:40) when a variety of activities geared to each grade level are scheduled. Fifth and sixth graders have an Uninterrupted, Self-Sustained Reading period (USSR). Seventh and eighth graders may have study periods or activities arranged by their teachers. All band and chorus rehearsals are scheduled during this period.

This final period of the day is supervised by the staff members who make up the interdisciplinary teams. Each team has at least one and usually two of these periods free each week to plan for their interdisciplinary activities.

As teachers planned together for the interdisciplinaries there were times when they could mesh some of the activities they had used in their regular classes. However, there was no attempt to replace regular instruction by transferring it to the interdisciplinaries; it is considered a supplement and a reinforcement for the basic instruction that students receive in their departmentalized classrooms.

The goals for the interdisciplinaries differ from regular classrooms in that the emphasis is on student behavior as much as on content. Some interesting features of the interdisciplinary program have emerged:

- Teachers report a renewal of energy and excitement as a result of cross-disciplinary contacts
- Teachers are more appreciative of the talents of other teachers as they work closely in integrating their work

As teachers planned together for the interdisciplinaries there were times when they could mesh some of the activities they had used in their regular classes.

- Teachers have demonstrated that they can work effectively in activities that are not patterned after those in traditional classrooms
- Every student in the school gets to work with every

teacher in the school during each school year, which heightens a sense of community and eases the transition from grade to grade

- Younger and older students work together very effectively and opportunities for student leadership are increased
- Multi-age grouping requires that notice be taken of individuals and their differences
- There is much less competition and much more cooperation in multi-age groupings.

As the Shelburne Middle School continues its program of interdisciplinary studies into the next school year, the teams have decided to focus on the theme, "Breaking Down the Barriers." Reflection on the first year of the program would indicate that some of the barriers have already been breached.

How To Evaluate Interdisciplinary Teams

The rationale for interdisciplinary teaming programs should serve as the basis for evaluation. Evaluation should therefore answer the following questions:

- What effect has interdisciplinary teaming had on student behavior, self-concept, and achievement?
- How has interdisciplinary teaming affected the transition process from elementary to high school?
- To what extent has teaming reduced the feeling of isolation among teachers and students and contributed to positive school climate?
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As teams begin to function more effectively, steps can be taken to utilize more formal evaluation procedures.

By Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark. From "Interdisciplinary Teaming Programs: Organization, Rationale, and Implementation." Schools in the Middle, *October 1987.*

JANUARY 1989

Getting Closer to Middle Level Students: Options for Teacher-Adviser Guidance Programs

By Gordon F. Vars

If there is any time in a person's life when guidance is needed, it is during the turbulent early adolescent years. From the very earliest days, middle level schools have shared this vital function with the home, the church, and other youth-serving agencies.

Gruhn and Douglass defined the school's responsibility for guidance as follows in their pioneering 1947 book, *The Modern Junior High School:*

- To assist students to make intelligent decisions about present educational activities and opportunities and to prepare them to make future educational decisions
- To assist students to make intelligent decisions about present vocational opportunities and to prepare them to make future vocational decisions
- To assist students to make satisfactory mental, emotional, and social adjustments in their growth toward a wholesome, well-adjusted personality
- To stimulate and prepare students to participate as effectively as possible in learning activities so that they may reach the fullest development of their individual interests and talents.

Almost every major pronouncement on middle level education since that time has given guidance a high priority (Vars, 1984a).

Clearly, such a tall order is beyond the scope of even the most capable and dedicated professional guidance staff, burdened as they usually are by student-counselor ratios as high as 400 to 1. Hence the increasing emphasis on teacher involvement in guidance activities, often through home-base, adviser-advisee, block-time, or other programs. The goal is for each student in the school to have at least one "adult who knows him or her well . . . who has a special responsibility for the individual's academic and personal welfare." (*This We Believe,* 1982). Schools have essentially two major ways to achieve this aim.

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Small Group Advisory Program

Teacher-adviser or adviser-advisee programs operate on the assumption that the way to help students and teachers become better acquainted is to enable them to meet in groups smaller than the typical class size of 25 to 30. This is achieved by involving nearly all available adults in the building: teachers, administrators, media staff members, and sometimes qualified custodial, office, and cafeteria staff members.

Parents and other community members also may be brought in to help keep the group size as small as possible, typically 12 to 15 students. Such programs can be very helpful, provided that all these adults have received adequate preparation, the program is well-designed, and there is support and encouragement by the guidance professionals.

The chief *advantages* of this approach are:

1. Small groups provide a more intimate environment in which to help young people deal with the many decisions and concerns that accompany the "in-between years." In the hands of a skillful adviser, advisory groups reach a high level of trust and function as effective support groups.

2. Involving all staff members in the program demonstrates a total school commitment to guidance that sends an important message to students, parents, and the community. Too often guidance counselors are viewed as supernumeraries, nice to have around but not really essential to school functioning. An adviser-advisee program makes it clear that guidance is everybody's job.

3. Having a regularly-scheduled advisory group period in the schedule demonstrates that guidance is part of the curriculum and also protects the guidance function from encroachment. One of the reasons the older "homeroom guidance" approach did not work well was that the homeroom period was taken over by student council activities, administrative announcements, money collection, and information distribution, which left little time for guidance. Advisory time is "protected time."

> If there is any time in a person's life when guidance is needed, it is during the turbulent early adolescent years.

4. Year-to-year articulation of the guidance program is easier when the same general scheduling pattern is followed from year to year and students know what to expect. Articulation is even better if advisers stay with the same small group of students throughout their three or four years in the middle school.

Providing guidance through small groups also has some serious *disadvantages:*

1. Requiring all staff members to take on an advisory group virtually guarantees that some staff members will be unwilling or incapable of carrying it off. Some teachers who are excellent instructors are unsuited by temperament and inclination to assume the role of a guidance group "facilitator." And all teachers, reluctant or not, will recognize that properly leading an advisory group requires as much preparation as any other class. They will expect this to be taken into account in determining teaching loads. If it is not, widespread staff resentment may destroy the program.

2. Scheduling an advisory program is a problem. First, how can we add one more thing to an already overcrowded schedule? And if we do, where do we put it and how much time is desirable for each session?

Some schools add a half-hour at the beginning or the end of the day. The morning time is apt to be disrupted by late arrivals and in the afternoon students usually are tired and looking forward to after-school activities. Similar problems arise if advisory is expected to share a period with some other activity, such as lunch. Furthermore, many sessions are just getting rolling after 30 minutes.

On the other hand, some advisers find that a full 50–minute period is too long, especially if the group meets every day. Yet if it meets only once or twice a week, it is difficult to maintain continuity and keep up student enthusiasm.

And no matter when the advisory period is scheduled, student problems and crises may crop up any time, so advisers, like guidance counselors, must be available for emergencies at any time.

3. Assigning teacher guidance to a specific program and a separate class period may protect it from curriculum encroachment, but it also isolates it from curriculum reinforcement. Sometimes the best guidance discussions follow the reading of a piece of literature or the examination of an historical event. English or history teachers may be reluctant to pursue these matters for fear they will encroach on the advisory program. This is especially true if the classroom teacher is not the adviser for those particular students.

4. Coordinating a total school guidance program is a huge undertaking, especially if it involves all kinds of staff members as well as outsiders. Guidance specialists must not only see that initial training is provided, but also regular updating and support. They must ensure that there is some uniformity in the learning activities carried out in the many advisory groups and still find time to follow through on special cases that cannot be handled adequately by teacher-advisers.

This brief review of the advantages and disadvantages of providing guidance through a small group advisory program should make it clear that there are important trade-offs in this approach.

Despite the current popularity of teacher adviser pro-

grams, school leaders should look very closely into the pros and cons of this approach and assess both the willingness and the capability of every staff member who might be involved.

Extended Time Advisory Program

Too often overlooked in the rush to establish advisory programs is an alternative way to bring about close relations between teacher and students—give them more time to work together. Paul S. George (1987) has documented the benefits gained when teacher teams "follow" the same students through their years in the middle level school.

On a smaller scale, there are several ways to increase the amount of time that a group of students spends with a particular teacher during any one day, week, or year.

> In the hands of a skillful adviser, advisory groups reach a high level of trust and function as effective support groups.

For example, no one is surprised that elementary teachers, who work with the same children nearly all day, get to know them very well, even in class groups of 25 to 30 students.

Similar results are evident in block-time and modified self-contained programs, where the teacher has the same students for two or three periods per day and teaches them two or more subjects.

Theodore Sizer (1984) recommended this approach as a small step in reducing the harmful effects of the fragmented and impersonal high school schedule.

Some homeroom or "home-base" programs provide somewhat extended contact by ensuring that students in a particular homeroom also have that same teacher for at least one regular class during a day. All these approaches are based on the assumption that extended time together promotes trust and facilitates teacher guidance.

Extended-time approaches to teacher guidance have several *advantages:*

1. It is possible to concentrate teacher guidance functions in the hands of fewer teachers. This makes for a smaller cadre of teachers that the guidance specialists must work with to carry out the program. Presumably, teachers who do not assume the guidance task will carry out other duties to help equalize teaching loads. This provides a very important "out" for staff members who are unwilling to serve as student advisers.

2. In self-contained or block-time situations, both teachers and students have fewer different persons to interact with every day. Students who have one teacher for English, social studies, and reading have just one teacher to adjust to, not three. Similarly, that teacher's full load may consist of two such block-time classes, giving him or her only 50 to 60 students, instead of a potential 180. The combination of fewer students and longer time together goes far toward building the rapport on which teacher guidance is based.

3. Self-contained and block-time teachers see students in a variety of situations, further enhancing their knowledge of their students.

To use the example cited above, students may function differently in a reading class than a social studies class, and still differently in language arts. The teacher also might supervise homeroom-type activities such as student council business, the planning of a class party, or an all-school fund drive.

These many different types of academic and social situations reveal student uniqueness to the teacher. Similarly, students will see the teacher in many different lights.

4. Within an extended time block, teachers find it easier to set aside a few moments to talk individually with a student. The "constant minor social crises" of early adolescence may occur at any time, not just during a scheduled advisory group meeting.

> The combination of fewer students and longer time together goes far toward building the rapport on which teacher guidance is based.

A self-contained teacher can assign the remainder of the class some seatwork pertinent to any of the several subjects included in the program, and then sit down with the student in a corner of the classroom.

Teachers who have only 40 to 50 minutes to accomplish

a day's objectives in a certain subject usually feel that they cannot take time to deal with individual students except in crisis situations.

5. When both guidance and instruction for a group of students are entrusted to the same teacher, the possibilities of integrating guidance and curriculum are enhanced. A story read in the English class may easily lead into an examination of human motives, needs, and values. The teacher adviser could follow this up with small group discussion, journal writing, personal essays, or role playing to bring the issue even closer to the personal lives of the students.

Likewise, a topic brought up in a guidance discussion could become the focus of a creative writing assignment or be related to the broader social scene being examined in social studies. This guidance-curriculum integration greatly enhances student motivation for learning, as has been demonstrated in decades of research on core curriculum (Vars, 1984b).

Asking a teacher to be both instructor and adviser to a group of students requires a shift in roles that may be difficult for some.

Despite its many apparent advantages, placing guidance in the hands of a self-contained or block-time teacher has a number of *disadvantages*:

1. Asking a teacher to be both instructor and adviser to a group of students requires a shift in roles that may be difficult for some. One might ask, "How can a teacher be empathetic and supportive one minute aand then academically demanding the next?" All teachers do this already, often several times within a single class period, as they respond to the shifting moods of the group. But to do this formally, with specific goals and expectations for guidance in addition to the many academic demands borne by teachers today, requires a high degree of flexibility.

2. In some schools, class sizes are so large that teachers are hard-pressed to get to know their students, even if they are with them a good portion of the day. Moreover, the task of just managing a class of 30 to 35 students leaves little time or energy for anything other than the basic curriculum, so guidance may be neglected.

3. Even if the class size is reasonable, the pressure to cover academic subject matter may overpower the need to set aside time for guidance. Demands for accountability in basic skills and knowledge, coupled with overloaded courses of study, may push guidance out entirely.

4. Giving students extended time with a good teacher can have many benefits, but this is hardly the case when the teacher is minimally competent. Even excellent teachers occasionally have personality conflicts with certain students. To lock them into an extended relationship may aggravate the problem.

On the other hand, when both teacher and student know they will have to spend a good portion of each day together, they may be more motivated to work for an accommodation than they would if they only had to "stick it out" for 45 minutes each day.

5. As with any block-time program, certification and teacher preparation may create problems. The child-centered perspective and broad preparation of the typical elementary teacher make it easier for them to assume the dual role. Unfortunately, in some states such teachers cannot teach beyond grade six.

Secondary-trained teachers, who are often specialists in one subject, cannot even teach a two-subject block without obtaining certification in another area. Fortunately, some of the newer middle grades teacher preparation programs lead to certification in two or three teaching fields and also include some training in the guidance/advisory role.

Teachers with this kind of preparation are desperately needed in the middle level schools of America.

Using a Variety of Approaches

This brief examination of two basic ways to help teachers get closer to students shows that each has advantages and disadvantages. Involving large numbers of faculty members and other adults to make advisory groups small in size inevitably brings into the system members who are unwilling or unable to do a good job of guidance. Using the other approach, giving teachers longer blocks of time to work with regular-size groups will concentrate the program in fewer hands, but it creates curriculum and staff complications.

Of course, the ideal solution is to hold all class sizes to 15 or fewer and to employ only middle level teachers

who are both competent in providing guidance and also certified in several teaching fields.

Until that far-off day, middle level schools might best employ a variety of approaches. It is both unwise and unnecessary to require complete uniformity in approach, either among schools or among teachers and teams within one school.

For example, at the fifth or sixth grade level, guidance functions might best be delegated to self-contained classroom teachers. Of course, time for guidance would have to be built into the schedule and they would need inservice preparation for assuming this role. And the program would have to be coordinated and monitored by the guidance department so that guidance is not shoved aside by academic concerns.

Such an approach builds on the strengths usually found in elementary-trained teachers, yet makes sure that the guidance program receives the same attention as any other portion of the curriculum.

At the seventh grade level, 20 to 30 minutes for guidance might be added to the block of time assigned to an English-social studies or mathematics-science block-time teacher. Each of these teachers might serve as an adviser to two groups, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. True, this would mean that each would serve as adviser for 50 to 60 students, but the extended time together would somewhat make up for this.

In the final analysis, the success of any teacher-guidance program rests squarely on the competence and commitment of the staff.

In eighth grade, guidance may have to be scheduled as a separate period, with the proviso that the adviser also has all of his or her advisees in a regular class some time during the day. While most advisers would be drawn from the basic academic areas, they could be augmented by volunteers from such areas as home economics, industrial arts, art, music, and physical education. This would reduce the size of the advisory groups somewhat, but still not require that *every* adult in the school take an advisory group.

Nor is it necessary for all teachers or teams at a particular grade level to use exactly the same approach. In a school using the interdisciplinary team organization, each team may be given a guidance curriculum and allotted a certain amount of time for it each week. The team would then decide for itself how to carry out the program.

On one team, each member may be happy to assume the role of adviser to a portion of the students. On another team, one or two members may choose to provide guidance for all the students on the team, while the remaining team members assume other responsibilities, such as planning field trips or coordinating all-team social activities.

On still another team, guidance may be divided by function, rather than student assignment. Each team member may serve as academic adviser and parent contact for his or her share of the students. But discussion of personal-social issues like peer relations would be carried out by one or two members of the team who are most comfortable with this aspect of guidance.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the success of any teacher-guidance program rests squarely on the competence and commitment of the staff. Ideally, all staff members, certified and non-certified, should receive training in the basics of guidance. At the very least, all adults in the building must support the guidance program, whether or not they are directly involved in working with an advisory group.

Indeed, guidance should permeate the entire school. A meaningful curriculum, empathetic teachers, and regular guidance or advisory sessions can help students to deal with many of the difficulties that accompany growing up. But this "preventive guidance" cannot eliminate the crises that arise in the lives of us all.

When these occur, a student should have immediate access to his or her adviser or counselor, and staff members should not be criticized for pulling a student out of a class to deal with the matter. To support this approach, administrators must be willing to cover for teachers who may be out of their classrooms for a brief period of time to take care of a student in need.

A school that really takes its guidance function seriously is a healthy place for young people to grow and learn, regardless of what the program is called or how it is organized.

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Moving Into and Out of the Middle Level School

Edward N. Brazee

The middle level school has been characterized as a transitional school—a link between elementary and high school.

However, very few middle level schools have attempted to meet the psychological, academic, and logistical problems of students moving from the elementary to the middle level or from the middle level to the high school with an organized and systematic plan.

Whenever students change schools or programs within schools, they need orientation and a period of adjustment to the new situation in which they often face different philosophies, procedures, requirements, expectations, and rewards.

Teachers who have little knowledge of the activities, expectations, or philosophies of the schools their students come from contribute to this problem of transition.

Except for the typical "move-up" day or the one-hour visit in the spring when principals and counselors (and coaches at the middle level school) visit the elementary or middle level to "prepare" students for life in the next school, little effort is made to help students make a smooth transition from one school to the next.

Yet, this need is so important that the authors of *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, (NASSP, 1985) address the need for a "transition panel" as one of the 12 dimensions of schooling necessary for excellence at the middle level:

> Schools should create a transition panel, composed of elementary, secondary, and middle level school teachers and parents. Panel members should discuss practices that interfere with smooth transition from one level to another, identify ways to facilitate this transition, and recommend to the schools or the board of education methods for fully integrating and articulating the K-12 programs in the district. (p. 17)

Although each transition program should be unique to the school it serves, there is a basic rationale for such a program, as well as specific activities that the transition panel might consider.

Why Is a Transition Program Needed?

Planning for a systematic transition program must be a shared responsibility, but administrators of the middle level school must assume most of the responsibility to begin such a program.

Nowhere can the range of abilities and needs of adolescents be seen more clearly than at the middle level. The common link in most school districts is the middle level school because it works with both ends of the system, elementary and high school.

Most important, responsibility for planning and implementing a transition program should begin at the middle level because the middle level has the most to gain and the most to lose from such a program. Generally, most people know the goals, objectives, and purposes of elementary schools and high schools. That is not true for the middle level school.

The transition program must be more than telling incoming students and parents "how it is going to be" in the new school. Orientation programs that include

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back-to-school open houses, informational meetings for parents, assistance in choosing high school classes, and visits to the high school all serve to ease transition in many districts. Alone, however, these activities are less than adequate in providing a long-range, well-planned program that anticipates normal transition needs.

Guidelines for a Transition Program

The transition panel must provide organized activities that meet the needs of students, teachers, and parents. Before the specific activities are set, however, the panel should consider several guidelines:

- *Purpose of the program.* The program should help students, teachers, and parents. Ultimately, the success of the transition program will be reflected in how students adjust and thrive in the new school.

  For teachers, success will be reflected in their ability to work with a new group of students.

  For parents, success will be measured by their understanding of their child's newest level of schooling.

- *The principal's role.* The principal is the key to the success of such a program. The relationships with elementary and high school principals are essential in establishing a climate in which professionals from different schools meet, talk, and plan for common concerns.

  The middle level principal recognizes that such a program will have both immediate and long-term positive effects for students and teachers.

- *Well-planned, well-organized, ongoing activities.* The transition program must be a regular part of a school's plan for the year; it cannot be seen as another added duty. It must be well-thought-out and well-organized. And it must be publicized so parents, students, and teachers know that the school has a specific plan and what that plan is.

- *Student involvement.* Students must be allowed to participate in the transition process by assessing their own strengths and needs, socially, academically, and physically. Fifth graders can do this as well as eighth graders.

  This self-assessment should begin before entering the new school and continue as the student becomes adjusted to the new expectations, requirements, and demands.

- *Middle level philosophy and practice.* As the pivotal point in the K-12 educational system, middle level schools must take an aggressive stance in explaining their programs to elementary and high school teachers. Because the middle level program often looks quite different (with teams, activity periods, adviser/advisee groups, etc.), colleagues in elementary and high schools must understand why the middle level school has these activities.

  The beginning point of such a discussion, of course, must focus on normal growth and development of transescents. Teachers outside a middle level school must not be inundated with middle level school practices and school organization information before they understand the basis of middle level education—human growth and development.

  No doubt, the moves from elementary school to middle level and from middle level to high school are each potentially traumatic. The move to the high school, however, usually attracts the most attention, because with college and other post-high-school plans the immediate stakes seem higher.

  Nevertheless, the transition program from elementary to the middle level needs as much planning.

Moving from Elementary to Middle Level

The transition from the elementary school to the middle level school should offer such activities as:

- Several informational programs for parents and students, held during the spring before students enter the middle level school, on various aspects of the middle level program.

  These programs should incorporate growth and development information as they explain the total middle level program. For example, an activity program meets physical, social, and intellectual needs of students. Interdisciplinary teams fulfill needs for stability and permanence, both crucial to early adolescents.

  Parent/student information programs must also focus on the mission of the school. How can parents and students understand the role of various programs when they don't know the philosophy of the school?

  Listen to students and their parents. They are concerned and a bit frightened about entering the new school.

  Finally, these informational programs must involve the entire faculty from the school, not just the principal and the counselor. Keep meetings short, no longer than one hour at the most.

- Faculty and students from the middle level should visit with students in their elementary classrooms during the spring, perhaps before the first information meeting, to talk with students about their concerns, expectations, and fears about the middle level school.

  Some teachers, counselors, and principals ask students to write about their concerns. This gives a good

idea of the kind of information to provide for students and parents at future informational meetings.

- Is "move-up" day at the end of the year worth the time and effort? Far too often, the "move-up" day is so chaotic and confusing that it sends the wrong message to the new students.

A more effective beginning is to have a shortened first day of school when students walk through their schedules with plenty of extra people to help them find their classrooms and lockers.

A calm, orderly, and stimulating first day sets the tone for the entire year. With adequate advanced planning, a middle level faculty could orient all students to specific rights, rules, and responsibilities on the first day.

Often overlooked, but vitally important, each teacher should plan a short but intriguing activity or lesson. Why not "catch" your students and make them want to come back to learn about language arts, science, or home economics?

- Assign each new student to a "buddy" student enrolled in a higher grade. This "buddy" has the specific responsibility of assisting the new student with any problems or questions. In addition, this student acts as a buffer for incorporating the new student into the school.
- No matter how the school is organized—into teams, houses, or departments—teachers must be sensitive to the students new to the middle level. This requires a conscious and concerted effort for teachers to observe and share information among themselves.

Each team meeting or each faculty meeting should allocate time to discuss any adjustment problems new students are having.

Moving from the Middle Level to the High School

With certain modifications, the activities mentioned in the previous section can be used as students move to the high school. Providing for the transition to high school should also include activities such as:

- Peer influence for those entering high school is more subtle, but potentially more volatile.

Accordingly, activities involving peers must be planned with care. This is particularly important because when high school students lead tours or talk about their schools, they often ignore the academic side of school. Most students enter the first day of high school with a strong sense of what high school will be from the social and athletic side, but have no real idea of the academic side.

- Ninth grade teachers and middle level teachers must meet regularly to talk about their students. If nothing else, these face-to-face meetings help eliminate the random complaints of ninth grade teachers who feel their new students are not prepared for high school.
- Orientation sessions for ninth graders must also include their parents. Parent/student/teacher conferences early in the ninth grade year are as important, although rarely seen.
- The middle level school must also have an end-of-the-year unit that highlights specific skills and abilities needed for success in high school. During this unit, students are exposed to high-school-like assignments, expectations, and grading. This four to six-week unit should include all content areas.

Eighth grade teachers work with their ninth grade colleagues on what these expectations are; ninth grade teachers should be guest teachers in the eighth grade class sometime during the unit.

For example, the ninth grade science classes may require laboratory write-ups that are quite different from those at the middle level. Eighth grade students should have practice with those write-ups. In English, students should have practice with the types of assignments that the ninth grade teachers give.

Such a "unit" offers an ideal opportunity for eighth and ninth grade teachers to meet, plan, and discuss the common problems of meeting the needs of the incoming ninth grade students.

The opportunity is also available for the middle level teachers to explain about the extensive middle level program the eighth graders completed.

Of course, such a unit, which is geared specifically to eighth graders moving into the high school, is a review of the preparation students have received from a well-rounded middle level education that spanned three or four years. In no case should it be seen only as a "last ditch" preparation for the "real" world of the high school.

Although some schools plan the entire eighth grade year as preparation for high school, that is neither necessary nor desirable. It does not take a 13 or 14-year-old nine months to become accustomed to a departmentalized schedule or other trappings of the typical high school program.

More important, the curriculum, instruction, and other activities of middle level schools exist because they meet the needs of the students. Eliminating those programs to spend more time on procedural elements of high school preparation does not make sense.

Conclusion

A transition program is important to fully integrate new students into all facets of school life.

The movement into a middle level school may be difficult for parents who have specific concerns about their children moving into a school with older students. In addition, parents generally have less contact with the middle level school and aren't always sure what to expect. Add the confusion about the purpose of the middle level school and the necessity for the school to provide a strong transition program for students and parents becomes readily apparent.

Students who move from the middle level school to the high school have other problems. Some students may not be ready to adjust to the more rigid academic structure of the high school. Others may have some difficulty with the self-discipline needed to operate independently.

Parents generally become more vocal because they know exactly what they want their sons and daughters to get from high school.

The needs of students, parents, and teachers that arise from moving from one school to another must be carefully considered and a comprehensive plan instituted.

Middle level educators would never knowingly ignore needs of their students. Why, then, shouldn't we provide help with the specific needs that arise from the transition process?

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Helping Middle Level Early Adolescents From Broken Homes

Robert Allers

Educating children today is obviously much different than it was 20 years ago. Computers, new scientific knowledge, and a fast-changing society make keeping our students informed a challenge.

To understand tomorrow's world of high technology and complex scientific facts our students must give education their full attention. Missing a week of school may mean the loss of cumulative information the student cannot successfully function without. The teacher's pace must remain constant, as a semester or term never seems enough time to give students information they need.

For many students, however, the desire to achieve in school is hampered by experiences at home. The necessity of learning new facts at school cannot compare to the necessity of surviving at home as a family. Changes often shake families up so severely that for a period of time they are non-functional in seemingly normal or routine settings.

Divorce has a pronounced effect on families. Statistics suggest that nearly 50 percent of the families in the United States will experience divorce. This, to educators, means that hundreds of thousands of students—more than 10 percent at any one time—will experience significant changes in their families in an often abrupt, traumatic manner: parents will move out of the house, families will experience a significant drop in income levels, and students will face increased responsibility and decreased supervision.

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As educators, we too often simply leave these home problems out of our educational process, saying "We are not trained therapists"; "We cannot be responsible for students' home problems"; "We don't have time to give emotional support to every student who needs it"; and "The parents don't want us involved."

In many ways, of course, this is true. Educators are trained to educate, not to provide therapy. Even if a teacher would like to give emotional support to a student whose family is experiencing divorce, when is there time to do so?

For many students, however, the desire to achieve in school is hampered by experiences at home. The necessity of learning new facts at school cannot compare to the necessity of surviving at home as a family.

We may not have a choice. Like it or not, trained or not, we may have to do a much better job of addressing the emotional needs of our students before we can address their educational needs.

Students' poor academic performance cannot typically be blamed on poor teaching skills. Instead, normal adolescent pressures are more than compounded by the stress of a divorce in the family. Even the most talented teacher cannot teach a student fractions if the student's mind is already crammed with thoughts of his or her parent's impending divorce or other family

These students exhibit proportionately more anxiety and restlessness than is typical for someone their age. They are often preoccupied with the family changes and have difficulty attending to tasks. Daydreaming and depression are common and some of the youngsters are very sensitive to criticism.

problems, especially when that young person also is facing the crises of puberty, role model identification, dating, and sexual experimentation.

Early adolescents are often angry about their parents' divorce and at times will act out their anger at school. They may intentionally do poor schoolwork to "punish" their parents, and may skip school simply to frustrate their parents.

Because they are very egocentric at this age, they have difficulty seeing beyond their own needs. They resent the extra duties they must now perform and the restrictions imposed when only one parent is in the house to meet their needs.

Adolescents are often confused, quickly changing moods; the divorce may complicate this. They may "hate Dad for moving out" yet "love Dad" more than anyone else in the world. The child is in the middle of role modeling and perhaps the parent removes that model when they move out. Because of the stress the parents are feeling, they may provide a poor (often hostile or depressed) model for the child.

Many young people also feel guilty about their parents' divorce, often resisting adult authority and feeling that some specific behavior they displayed sent Mom packing.

The youngster may also take on too much responsibility and try to fill the role left when one parent moves out: a role too big and inappropriate for the child.

Stress from Parents' Divorce

These children experience many sources of frustration, anger, and confusion as they relate to their parents' divorce. All of this creates stress that often carries over into school performance. The reasons for the adolescent's stress are many and may include the following:

- *Parent Hostility.* The most obvious source of stress comes from seeing two loved parents separate and often become bitter enemies. Parent hostility often does not lessen after a separation and, in fact, may actually increase.

- *Parent Stress.* Watching parents withdraw, cry, become angry, etc., affects the adolescent.

- *Parents Dating and Remarriage.* This is usually not easily accepted by adolescents and emotions often run high as they see parents interact emotionally and physically with new adults.

- *Decrease in Income.* Youngsters must often change their lifestyles as budgets become very tight after divorce. Where one house existed on $20,000, now two households must exist. Dance class cannot be afforded, weekly roller skating is too expensive, and that first car they almost had is impossible.

- *Moving.* With the decrease in income often comes the need to move. Houses must be sold and a less expensive apartment might be necessary.

Early adolescents are often angry about their parents' divorce and at times will act out their anger at school. They may intentionally do poor schoolwork to "punish" their parents, and may skip school simply to frustrate their parents.

- *Increased Responsibility.* Often adolescents need to help fulfill the role left by the absent parent. Babysitting for siblings is common and some school activities must be missed because no one is there to take over a given responsibility.

- *Support System for Parents.* Youngsters often are caught in the middle of their parents' divorce. Listening to one parent degrade the other, comforting a sad parent, carrying messages from one parent to another, etc., puts them in a difficult emotional situation.

- *Planned Events.* At times these adolescents actually avoid certain events because of the stress involved. Envision two parents in the audience at a graduation ceremony: they sit on opposite sides of the room with their new spouses; neither will talk to the other; both

feel the youngster might "support" the other parent more. The speaker calls the student's name and asks him or her to come forward "with your parents to accept a special award." Enough said.

> Many young people also feel guilty about their parents' divorce, often resisting adult authority and feeling that some specific behavior they displayed sent Mom packing.

• *Visitation.* Seeing both parents is important and the youngster loves both of them. Wednesday, however, is both the scheduled visitation day with Mom *and* the basketball game and Thursday is a big test. What does the young person tell Mom?

• *New Siblings.* Remarriage often brings new siblings. This can be difficult for everyone in the family, especially the children.

• *Guilt.* Many adolescents mistakenly feel they in some way caused their parents' divorce or contributed to it.

Research about the effects of divorce on family members is still in its infancy. We have even less information about the way divorce affects a student academically. Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) suggest these adolescents may carry their stress into the classroom. These students exhibit proportionately more anxiety and restlessness than is typical for someone their age. They are often preoccupied with the family changes and have difficulty attending to tasks. Daydreaming and depression are common and some of the youngsters are very sensitive to criticism. Statistically they have more difficulty academically than their peers and are more apt to drop out of school.

Searching for Answers and Support

Unfortunately these students receive very little emotional support before, during, and after their parents' divorce. While the parents may wish to guide the child through the stress of divorce, they are frequently struggling with their own survival.

Parents

While adolescents may have many questions about their parents' divorce, they generally find themselves unable to approach the subject with their parents or other adults. The adolescent may be afraid to ask his or her parents questions about the divorce because the parents' reactions may be anger or depression.

Parents also often have difficulty discussing divorce because they are under stress, and because they often know little about the legal processes of divorce, etc. Parents may also intentionally withhold information, fearing the information may harm the child or believing that the child simply "just doesn't need to know."

Friends

During times of stress adults use friends as a source of comfort and, of course, so do their children. However, using a friend for support and/or comfort is not always helpful for an adolescent.

• The divorce is frequently a source of embarrassment to the child.

• Most of these adolescents feel friends will not understand concerns unless the friend's parents have also divorced (and they are likely right).

• Generally these youngsters don't know enough about their parents' divorce to hold a good conversation about it.

> Unfortunately these students receive very little emotional support before, during, and after their parents' divorce. While the parents may wish to guide the child through the stress of divorce, they are frequently struggling with their own survival.

Many children never share thoughts about their parents' divorce with friends, and those who do generally remain very superficial, although females usually share more (with one or two friends) than males do. This being true, most conversations are short, rather superficial, and seldom therapeutic.

Relatives and Neighbors

Relatives and neighbors are another source of support to young people. When a divorce is concerned, however, these individuals are often biased and do not offer an adequate support system. Grandma A knows her son was "not to blame" for the divorce while Grandma B is sure her daughter was a model wife to that "has been."

> During times of stress adults use friends as a source of comfort and, of course, so do their children. However, using a friend for support and/or comfort is not always helpful for an adolescent.

Telling Grandma A (Dad's mother) about not wanting to see Dad so often is like putting gas on a fire. Family members are already very sensitive and protective; if they feel the adolescent in any way is negative toward one parent or overly positive toward the other, reactions can be pronounced.

Educators

One of the few neutral zones for the young person is school. Educators are generally unbiased toward either parent and the student may choose the physical setting of school instead of the stressful setting of home. Here, there is little fear of saying anything wrong about parents and little or no *demand* to say anything about the family status at all. (This does not mean the child will produce academically.) Knowing school will remain stable, consistent, and uninvolved in the divorce, adolescents often find educators and the school to be an effective, perhaps unintentional, support system.

What Can Educators Do?

Educators can be instrumental in helping these adolescents remain emotionally healthy during times of stress. They can provide therapy of a kind by offering compassion, concern, emotional support, and information about all aspects of our lives—including divorce.

While educators may know little about the student's parents' divorce, they often know more than they realize and certainly than the adolescent knows about divorce. They can help the student by encouraging him or her and at times simply showing care and concern.

Dilemmas and Solutions

When a family is in transition, educators are faced with problems of communication with both parents, legal questions, terminology, and lack of parental support for the student.

Report cards, notices of meetings and special events, phone calls, etc., are usually directed to one of the student's parents. In the case of one-parent families, the first problem for educators is contacting the custodial parent (or the parent the child is living with). This parent is usually working and it may take days of effort to contact him or her.

The second problem is that if only one parent is contacted, he or she may not pass the information on to the other. Miscommunication between parents is possible, but a lack of communication is more probable.

The school can and should make every attempt possible to involve both (or all three, four, etc.) parents in the adolescent's education. Ask for the name and address of both parents, encourage the student to invite all of his or her parents to school events, send information about school events to both parents (some parents don't attend activities because they weren't told of the event), and give the student two copies of information to parents and ask him or her to give one copy to each parent.

Educators also have questions about what they can or cannot do legally after a student's parents have divorced. "Can I talk to the noncustodial parent? Who can be sent report cards? Who can pick the child up at school?"

> Parents also often have difficulty discussing divorce because they are under stress, and because they often know little about the legal processes of divorce, etc. Parents may also intentionally withhold information, fearing the information may harm the child or believing that the child simply "just doesn't need to know."

Answers to these questions are often troubling to principals and other administrators. Basically, both parents have equal access to their child's records, teacher activities, etc. What privilege we give one parent can legally be afforded the other parent. It is true, however, that only the parent who has custody (or guardianship) can sign legal forms and a noncustodial parent's right to pick up the student from school must fall within the legal visitation schedule (if the court has established one). If the noncustodial parent is supposed to legally pick up the student at 5:00 p.m., technically it is illegal for her to pick up the child at 4:00 p.m.

Enforcement of visitation schedules, etc., is not, of course, the responsibility of the school. These are police and family court matters, and, if at all possible should be enforced by those charged with that responsibility. Unfortunately all too often teachers and principals are asked to be enforcers even though this is clearly not their role.

Enforcement of visitation schedules, etc., is not, of course, the responsibility of the school. These are police and family court matters, and, if at all possible should be enforced by those charged with that responsibility.

What if Dad calls the school and says, "Don't let Todd's mother pick him up from school, she plans to kidnap him"? If the mother is not the custodial parent, the school should advise the father to call the police and ask for their assistance. The school administrator can also call the police or other appropriate agency, in order to avoid having to come between a parent and child in this situation. But, if law enforcement personnel do not appear, try to dissuade the noncustodial parent from picking up the student if there is no custodial parent's consent. (See NASSP *Legal Memorandum*, Sept. 1984, "The Nontraditional Family: Legal Problems for Schools.")

What else can educators do? First, they can look for signs of stress in their students. While all educators can identify the fact Tom is under stress—he set the school on fire—we must also identify Tina's stress, as she sits quiet and motionless in the back of the classroom.

Many soft signs of stress are exhibited by all of us at some time, but if the student displays particular behaviors that are unique or pronounced for the adolescent, they can be an important sign of stress. These behaviors include: absentmindedness, nervousness, weariness (appears lethargic, tired, etc.), moodiness, withdrawal, declining grades, physical complaints, and misbehaving (Allers, 1980).

It may, in fact, be more important to support the child who seems "just a little depressed" than the child who acts up. At least the misbehaving adolescent is venting his or her emotions.

These signs of stress are often found before the divorce, not just during and after. Family tension usually builds before parents physically separate, and children may hear increased fighting and threats by parents. Children, in fact, will often be acting much as their parents are (depressed, angry, etc.) before the actual divorce. For some children the tension surrounding the divorce may be greatest before the actual separation of their parents.

Many children seem to feel remarkably little tension about their parents' divorce. Not all adolescents are torn apart by their parents' divorce. It is easy to relate the stress to the divorce when it may actually be coming from another source (academics, peer relationships, etc.). When a student shows signs of stress a teacher can gain tremendous insight by simply asking him or her about possible stresses.

Educators can also help adolescents by knowing how to talk to them. They must know what stepfather, stepsister, custody, joint custody, visitation, etc., means, and understand who they are addressing and what their role with the student is.

In addition:

- Educators should keep books about divorce, feelings, stepfamilies, death, etc., in the library. Books for parents should also be made available.

- Ensure that all parents are made a part of the students' educational program. Invite all parents to activities and programs. Distribute calendars, report cards, and other notices to all of the student's parents.

- Schedule inservices for staff members that focus on divorce. Teachers can only react appropriately if they are taught how to.

When a family is in transition, educators are faced with problems of communication with both parents, legal questions, terminology, and lack of parental support for the student.

- Teach adolescents about divorce. Encourage open classroom discussion about differing family makeups. Teach them words to describe feelings and let them know where they can seek out individuals to listen to them.

- Provide or establish groups for students whose parents are or have experienced divorce. These groups are simple to run and can be held during the school day (noon hours, recess, etc.). When possible, encour-

age specialists, such as social workers and psychologists to initiate such programs.

- Provide forms so parents can list all names, addresses, and phone numbers. Much valuable information may be lost because we don't ask for it.
- Set a positive example. A principal who addresses the needs of such families may well find his or her staff members doing the same.
- Establish support groups for the adolescents (and if possible their parents) where peer counseling might take place.

Families experiencing divorce do have special needs at times. This may especially be true of their young people. We as educators must offer these children our knowledge, support and time.

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JANUARY 1990

Heterogeneous Grouping in Middle Level Schools: Leadership Responsibilities for Principals

By Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.

Middle level schools continue to wrestle with grouping issues. When schools view grouping as either a philosophy or a strategy, grouping arrangements become inflexible structures that classify students into closed settings for learning.

When philosophic issues and strategic needs interface, grouping can establish better learning and personal development environments in schools.

The fundamental purpose of grouping should be to place students in settings that best meet their learning needs. During the past two decades, homogeneous grouping by ability and tracking arrangements have become more popular in schools. However, the results of homogeneous grouping of students by ability do not warrant its continued use, particularly in middle level school programs.

George (1988) noted "tracking does not deliver consistently favorable results for any group of students" and "the effects of tracking on individuals, or classroom groups, affectively is often powerfully negative." In reviewing a select sample of 154 of what were reputedly some of the nation's best middle level schools, George concluded "virtually all of the outstanding middle schools surveyed placed students in heterogeneously grouped interdisciplinary teams."

Democratic society requires that people be able to function in the least restrictive environments possible. More heterogeneous grouping provides opportunities for students to learn in widening developmental ranges. Such arrangements allow movement toward greater heterogeneity. This is more natural and realistic than limiting learning opportunities within homogeneously ability-grouped frames.

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Neither completely heterogeneous nor homogeneous approaches deal responsively with the developmental variance among young adolescents. Certain central principles should be considered in identifying and developing grouping arrangements appropriate for use in middle level schools.

- Grouping arrangements should best meet early adolescent developmental needs. Effective groupings depend to a large extent on adequate guidance in helping pupils select courses and cocurricular activities suited to their abilities and interests.

- Subgrouping on bases of ability, achievement, or interest within classes in a specific area is more justifiable than grouping on the basis of general intelligence. Use of any single limited grouping arrangement on a schoolwide basis in middle level schools should be avoided.

- Many criteria for determining pupil learning capacities should be utilized. Previous performance in a subject and specific evaluations of readiness should also be considered. Teachers' estimates should be included and reliance upon a single test score should be avoided.

- The merits of ability, achievement, and interest must be clearly defined as they relate to grouping needs in specific areas of middle level school programs.

In view of such principles, J. Howard Johnston and Glenn Markle (1986) reported the following in their review of research on grouping in middle level schools.

> The practice of grouping students by ability for instructional purposes is not supported by research. Even though a majority of teachers believes that abili-

ty grouping improves the effectiveness of schooling, the studies reviewed suggest that the practice has deleterious effects on teacher expectations and instructional practices (especially for students in lower ability groups), student perceptions of self and others, and academic performance of lower ability students.

Ability grouping interferes with opportunities for students to learn from — and learn to accept — peers of different socioeconomic backgrounds, and may perpetuate notions of superior and inferior classes of citizens. The practice is especially antithetical to the goals and objectives of the middle school. (p. 57)

The Case Against Homogeneous Grouping by Ability

In the January 1989 *ASCD Curriculum Update*, Robert Slavin gave the following response to this question: "The sorting of students into ability groups has come under increasing fire recently. Should schools end the practice of grouping students by ability?"

A decision to assign a child to an ability group or track will have far-reaching consequences, as grouping decisions made at one point in a child's school experience greatly influence later grouping decisions.

Students assigned to lower groups or tracks are less likely to graduate or go on to college than students of the same ability assigned to higher tracks. Their teachers have lower expectations for them and may teach at too slow a pace. In integrated schools, tracking usually creates racially identifiable groups, which can create inequities along racial or ethnic lines. For these reasons, grouping by ability should be avoided as much as possible and used only where there is clear educational justification.

There are several situations when grouping may be justified. At the elementary level, there is no research to suggest any benefit of between-class ability grouping, but within-class grouping (i.e., reading and math groups within the class) can be beneficial. There is research supporting the Joplin Plan, in which students are grouped for reading according to reading level but regardless of age. *At the middle school level there is still no known benefit to ability grouping* but acceleration programs for mathematically talented students may be effective. High school students should be able to choose courses according to their interests and skills, but counselors must be careful to avoid steering students into low ability courses. While ability grouping may sometimes be necessary, we should avoid it as much as possible.

Student learning capacities change more rapidly and more often during their middle level school years than in either elementary or high school. To improve early adolescent intellectual development and achievement, middle level schools must identify the kinds, degrees, and ranges of diversity in ability, achievement, interest, and social development that will create the most effective learning environments. No single pattern will fit all situations. The challenge is to move away from set patterns that lock students into fixed homogeneous arrangements for the semester or the school year.

The Carnegie Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents' *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century* (Hornbeck, 1989) clearly endorses the need to move away from tracking and homogeneous grouping by ability.

> Tracking has proven to be one of the most divisive and damaging school practices in existence. Time and time again, young people placed in lower academic tracks or classes, often during the middle grades are locked into dull, repetitive instructional programs leading at best to minimum competencies. The psychic numbing these youth experience from a "dumbed-down" curriculum contrasts sharply with the exciting opportunities for learning and critical thinking that students placed in higher tracks or classes may experience. (pp. 49-59)

Leadership Tasks in Widening Grouping Arrangements

How can middle level school principals successfully implement more heterogeneous grouping arrangements in their schools? The initial task is to avoid past leadership mistakes in dealing with innovations. The second is to develop approaches on successful implementation of more heterogeneous grouping procedures.

Like the legendary "graveyard of the elephants," there also is a "graveyard of unsuccessful educational innovations." Although well thought-out in theory and successful practice, many promising innovations subsequently failed in many schools. In those cases cynics were invariably moved to observe "there goes another pie-in-the-sky idea."

However, some schools continue to use these innovations with great success. Why? The answer appears to be that those schools took the time to develop specific staff development/inservice experiences that provided staff members with the skills needed to successfully implement that innovation. An example of this can be seen in current re-examination of schools that have continued multi-age grouping and non-graded organizational procedures (Cohen, 1989a and 1989b).

As new or reorganized school programs are planned and developed, both short and long-range implications of skills necessary to implement these programs must be clearly iden-

tified. Decisions regarding immediate and subsequent skills teachers will need to implement newly developed school programs successfully must be carefully studied.

If initiated before teachers develop such necessary skills, an innovation will not achieve its instructional improvement potential. For example, core curriculum approaches continue to be very effective in middle level schools in which teachers gained and continue to acquire the skills to deliver effective core curriculum programs.

In the past, few college or university preservice teacher education programs provided teachers with the skills necessary to implement core programs. In like manner, most schools did not provide staff development/inservice experiences that prepared teachers to successfully implement core curriculum approaches.

While many schools quickly embraced the core curriculum concept, few bothered to equip teachers with the skills needed to introduce the program. Core programs staffed by teachers who lacked these skills fared poorly. Those schools subsequently discarded the programs after unsatisfactory results and erroneously dismissed core curriculum as a poorly thought-out educational fad.

Core curriculum was, and remains, conceptually and practically sound. Its lack of success in the circumstances described can be traced to leaders who erroneously assumed that teachers who lacked necessary skills could successfully implement the innovation. Realistically, neither brain surgery nor educational innovations can be effectively self-taught! Adequate staff development experiences are prerequisite to introducing more heterogeneous grouping arrangements in middle level schools.

Preparing To Implement Heterogeneous Grouping Arrangements

Today's middle level school teachers do not possess the skills needed to successfully implement more heterogeneous grouping arrangements. Preservice teacher education programs must respond to this critical concern. However, principals must work with staff members to develop skills needed to successfully move away from homogeneous grouping by ability and tracking approaches.

While we may embrace the rhetoric to move toward more heterogeneous grouping arrangements in middle level schools, two caveats must be recognized:

- First, subscribing to a concept in itself does not equip one with the skills needed to deliver that concept in practice.

- Second, while teachers may agree intellectually with the need to change from homogeneous grouping, unless they gain the skills to do otherwise, they will return to their classrooms and teach the only way they know how.

Principals must provide leadership to enable staff members to gain the skills to successfully implement more heterogeneously grouped arrangements. By default, regression toward the mean of tracking will occur if heterogeneous grouping approaches are inadequate.

In a recent interview on the Carnegie Task Force on Adolescent Education Report (Koerner, 1989), Chairman David Hornbeck responded to the question "How about tracking? What would schools replace it with?" Middle level school principals should consider how to best accommodate his following response:

> One of the generically best strategies is what has come to be called cooperative learning. There are various versions of that but it basically revolves around high achieving youngsters helping those youngsters who are not achieving as well. One of the most popular forms of it is peer tutoring. An essential component to any effort to eliminate tracking depends upon staff development activities where teachers learn how to use alternative strategies. (p. 69)

Teachers will need extensive education in the area of cooperative learning and make decisions about the skills that will best prepare them to implement it. The works of Kagan (1988), Johnson and Johnson (1987), Slavin et al. (1985), and Slavin (1986b), among others, emphasize the importance of skill development by teachers to fully utilize collaborative learning for better student learning in heterogeneous circumstances.

Principals should examine how colleagues in area schools are implementing heterogeneous grouping practices to identify effective staff development activities that have facilitated effective implementation. Principals can share individuals who have developed these skills.

Individuals who have attended different training programs can help organize staff development activities in other districts. Using the "turn-key" principle can prepare other inservice leaders within and among networking middle level schools. Inservice activities should take advantage of "jigsaw" and other cooperative learning techniques teachers have found effective in developing heterogeneously grouped procedures. Peer coaching approaches can also assist middle level school personnel in developing and refining cooperative learning skills used to implement successful heterogeneously grouped classroom arrangements.

Conclusion

Heterogeneous grouping arrangements in middle level classrooms can provide opportunities for students to master particular activities and materials in lessons and instructional units. Teachers must learn how to assign students to

small (3 to 5) heterogeneous mixed and somewhat long-term cooperative learning groups. Cooperative learning activities can develop positive interdependence as students work together and as members of a learning group become responsible for individual growth and for each other.

Properly implemented, cooperative learning develops constructive peer learning in a safer psychological environment than in the class at large. Total competition is replaced by collaboration in smaller settings within the class. Practice is encouraged in an invitational setting. Supportive collaboration allows learning to proceed and mistakes to be corrected without fear of negative judgment by the class or the teacher.

Cooperative learning approaches in more heterogeneously grouped classes allow students across the ability spectrum to learn better at their own rates. This cannot be accomplished unless teachers develop and understand the "how" of skills needed to deliver such programs.

The leadership task of middle level school principals is to move toward the proven results of such programs (Slavin, 1989/90). This will require local study and definition among the school community and within the professional staff. To move toward such learning success for young adolescents requires that principals and staff members collaborate in developing a timeline to deliver the skills necessary for success in more heterogeneously grouped middle level school programs.

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Planning Gifted/Talented Middle Level School Programs: Issues and Guidelines

By Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.

The current national enabling legislation for Gifted/Talented (G/T) education, passed in 1967, did not define G/T populations for any level of the school system. Indeed, so many definitions of this special population have emerged that the exceptional education field still recommends no central definition of this area for use by educators in developing school programs.

Currently, 10 states still have not developed G/T programs under terms of that 1967 legislation, even though it allows each individual state to define and initiate G/T programs themselves. New York state, for instance, mandates that each school district develop its own definition for giftedness.

Lacking such a key working definition, schools throughout the nation continue to develop their own regulations and school programs for those youngsters identified as G/T in their state or community. One problem, however, persists. Students in a G/T school program who move to another state may find they are no longer G/T students in terms of the new home state's educational specifications. The opposite can also occur.

Definitions of G/T include the following:

- Students who score three standard deviations above the norm on a specific I.Q. test required in that state are considered G/T
- Students in the upper 3 percent of the intellectual population of the school are considered G/T
- Students scoring more than 125 in a required I.Q. test are considered G/T.

Furthermore, some states define "giftedness" as applying to academic subjects and "talented" to other content areas. Other states restrict "giftedness" to describe students highly able in mathematics and science while identifying those highly able in the arts and humanities as "talented." State and local school district definitions of the "gifted," "talented," "bright," and "highly able" in many cases are only loose descriptors of student populations assembled for something "better and more advanced" than regular courses.

Yet, these definitions, more often than not, are applied with an absolute rigor to separate students for course offerings. A monolithic definition is not recommended here. However, better philosophic agreement about terminology is needed if school programs are to become more responsive to the needs of highly able learners.

Focusing on G/T Middle Level Concerns

Middle level educational planning for gifted/talented youngsters must not overlook the developmental factors common to all youngsters between 10 and 14 years of age. In *The Middle School*, Donald Eichhorn (1966) defined this time as "transescence":

> "The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based upon the many physical,

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social, emotional, and intellectual changes that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time when the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes."

These tasks are essential in developing school programs that respond to the educational and human needs of special ability learners as well to all middle level school-aged youngsters.

The differences in program emphasis in the elementary and high school are marked, but it is much more difficult to define and separate the "shades of gray" middle level program concerns from those of both the final elementary and beginning high school years. This holds true for defining middle level G/T program emphasis in relation to K-12 G/T issues.

Middle level schools must help students define and maximize their special abilities during their transition from early childhood to adolescence. William Gruhn's classic junior high functions (integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation) provide an excellent basis for developing G/T program concerns (Arth et al., 1985).

Eichhorn's description of early adolescence should help educators develop realistic expectations for high ability youngsters during the middle level school years. Because of these changes, each youngster will display an individual range of special talents and abilities relevant to her or his personal-social and academic development. Therefore, middle level G/T programs must accommodate individuals who demonstrate new talent or high abilities during early adolescence as well as students who continue their interest in talents they developed earlier.

As educators and parents understand and accept these realities, G/T programs can better respond to both temporary and persisting special abilities of youngsters. For that reason, attempts to focus middle level G/T programs on elitist concerns should be discouraged. They are inconsistent with the general education and exploratory nature of middle level education. Options for extremely talented adolescents should be developed as particular individuals demonstrate their readiness and need for such opportunities.

The increased interest and desire of some parents and educators to extend elitist G/T programs must be recognized. It is important, however, that such exclusive hierarchies not be allowed to limit middle level education's obligation to respond to the range of adolescents' educational needs, even within this audience of highly able learners. G/T activities for the majority of middle level youngsters should neither be dictated by nor based upon the norms achievable by the small number of the most highly gifted students at that level.

Middle Level G/T Problems

The impact of change and transition that middle level youngsters experience in approaching and reaching puberty should not be underestimated. The interests, talents, and high abilities they demonstrated during elementary school may diminish or cease as "new beats of different drummers" emerge during their middle level school years. Middle level G/T programs should help youngsters pursue emerging areas of interest and ability. Such shifts and changes are normal as students enter the greatest transitional period of their lives.

For example, youngsters who continue or discover interests and talents in music and dance are frequently frustrated by the normal loss of coordination that occurs at some point during their pubescent physical growth. A student who has mastered an action or activity is frustrated when her or his body suddenly experiences dramatic changes in a short time. These changes can include rapid lengthening of bones in the legs, arms, or fingers, and transformation of the larynx. Teachers should help youngsters understand that body coordination and voice control will stabilize again so they can better tolerate these difficulties during this transition period.

Many youngsters find that new, emerging talents may supplant ones in which they excelled during their earlier years. Adults should not discourage them from pursuing these new interests. Forcing youngsters to continue in former talent areas that no longer interest them usually nurtures dislike for those areas. They may return to some former talent areas and not to others.

If middle level G/T programs provide adequate exploratory emphasis, students can delve into emerging talent interests and better determine which areas were only short-term interests. This will help more students define their own emerging talents and consolidate persisting ones. Therefore, diversity of middle level G/T offerings is important to capture the interests of highly able youngsters.

Educators working in middle level G/T programs must also expect new "stars" to emerge, as their growing seriousness of purpose and emerging latent talents during the middle level school years make these "late-bloomers" a significant group.

The need to assist youngsters with emerging or latent abilities should not be precluded by district policies that

focus instead on early identification of talent and ability at the expense of all else. Middle level schools must help parents understand that as youngsters go through the profound self-definition associated with adolescent growth and development, they will resolve conflicts about new and old interests and talents.

Middle level school leaders should resist the temptation to accelerate high school learning into G/T requirements in their schools. Likewise, the continuation of elementary-school appropriate G/T activities into the middle level should not be automatic. Both cognitive and affective needs of high ability and talented early adolescents should become major bases in planning and developing middle level school G/T experiences.

These should be the primary factors in determining and tailoring programs for the highly able learner in the middle level school. As middle level school students have special talents, they also have special needs in terms of peer relations and self-concept and esteem issues. Middle level school principals will find Beane's (1983) discussion of middle level self-concept and esteem issues helpful in dealing with this issue.

Cognitive Expectations and Affective Outcomes

Middle level G/T programs must deal with enrichment and acceleration issues within the context of the social and emotional development of youngsters during this difficult time. Educators and parents must recognize that earlier is not always better. Enrichment at a learner's present cognitive level can be more important in some circumstances than narrow, linear, accelerated emphasis. Effective acceleration provides the broadest, richest learning experience possible.

Thus, enrichment and acceleration should not be viewed as either/or approaches. This is especially important if a particular intellectual challenge requires cognitive skills that are beyond the individual's cognitive levels and capacities at that time. Enrichment at the student's highest levels will provide significant learning until readiness to accelerate to higher cognitive abilities is demonstrated.

Middle level educators should not misinterpret this as trying to hold youngsters back or recommending challenges below their special abilities. Certainly, we should provide learning opportunities that appropriately challenge early adolescents who are capable of such higher level challenges. However, we should not require all gifted and talented youngsters to pursue these same challenges and activities. The differences and changes in intellectual and cognitive abilities during the middle school years need constant monitoring.

I.Q. and Thinking Levels

The I.Q. score is typically a major screen used to identify and select candidates for G/T programs. High I.Q., talents in specific areas, and past academic performance normally are the bases for recommending students for the highest challenge programs.

Actually, I.Q. alone tells us only the rate at which a student can learn something new. In itself, I.Q. *does not* specify the learner's cognitive levels and thinking abilities. However, we often falsely assume that all high I.Q. students have achieved advanced cognitive thinking levels.

When students do not master expected skills, educators must determine whether there is an identification or maturation problem. This is true for gifted and talented students as well. The results of Roger Webb's longitudinal study of students between 6 and 11 years of age with 150+ I.Q. scores deserves attention (1974). These youngsters did not demonstrate the consistent ability to perform at formal, abstract thinking levels that most educators assume. In examining a broad spectrum of 100 to 125 I.Q. 7th grade students, I found that 55 percent of the high I.Q. students did not demonstrate abstract, formal operational thinking abilities (Toepfer and Marani, 1980). However, significant numbers of the 100 I.Q. students could perform formal level activities.

Selecting students for G/T courses based on I.Q. score without specifically identifying their thinking levels is a serious oversight. Concrete operational thinking is the highest level achieved by most students during their middle level school years. It is important to identify which middle level school G/T courses require abstract formal operational thinking beyond mere memorization skills. Appropriate placement requires identifying those middle level students who have achieved beginning abstract thinking abilities as opposed to the majority whose highest cognitive level is concrete operational thinking.

For instance, how do we decide whether or not middle level students are ready to take a G/T math course that includes high school mathematics content? I.Q., general mathematics skills, and success in non-algebraic or geometric courses most often form the basis for recommending students for courses requiring formal or abstract thinking abilities. However, these screens do not, in themselves, identify cognitive levels.

While most above-average middle level students can memorize algebraic or geometric processes, understand-

ing those processes requires at least beginning abstract, formal thinking capability. What can happen when students lacking these thinking abilities are placed in courses that require those skills? In such inappropriate placement they risk overchallenge, frustration, poor understanding of course information and skills, in addition to minimal or unsuccessful learning.

Since the appearance of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, many states have sought to legislate and accelerate high school program expectations into the middle school level on the erroneous assumption that "earlier is better." Such perceptions reflect inaccurate understanding of the differences between the intellectual and social-emotional readiness of even some gifted early adolescents from those of more intellectually mature high school students. "Earlier is better" is true only for those youngsters whose earlier intellectual readiness for such challenges is confirmed.

There is no disagreement with the need for middle level schools to provide earlier intellectual challenges to youngsters who are identified as intellectually precocious and who have demonstrated early readiness for specific advanced challenges. However, we must not place youngsters who cannot yet think at the levels required for such advanced work in those classes. By waiting a year, these students will probably experience the neurological maturation required to perform successfully at more formal thinking levels. During the middle level school years, not all gifted learners are among the first students to experience that particular maturation (Toepfer, 1985).

Unrealistic parental expectations combined with the lack of clear educational regulations in many states have placed substantial numbers of highly able middle level school students in overchallenging situations. While well-intentioned, such efforts can put some gifted and talented youngsters who have not developed specific formal or abstract learning skills "at-risk" of predictably poorer school achievement. These misplaced gifted and talented students are often, then, erroneously labeled as the "underachieving gifted."

In many cases this is only a problem of temporary delay in readiness development. Their lower achievement during such an interval could have been avoided had they been allowed the additional time needed to develop the intellectual maturity required for success in those situations.

The impact of a student's self-concept as a learner is particularly critical for gifted and talented youth. Beane and Lipka (1986) suggest that self-concept as a learner can be twice as powerful as I.Q. in one's academic achievement. This is as true for bright youngsters as it is for all other students. Gifted students who fare poorly from the overchallenge of misplacement during their middle level school years often demonstrate significantly lowered self-concept and self-esteem.

This can be accompanied by students losing confidence in their abilities. Not accustomed to such frustration, these gifted learners may be less willing to extend their abilities for fear of demonstrating less than outstanding success.

Students require formal operational thinking capacity to comprehend and understand metaphor and imagery in language arts. In mathematics, students at concrete operational thinking levels can memorize sine, cosine, tangent, and other algebraic information. However, a student must be at formal operational thinking if he or she is to be expected to fully understand and process algebra (Toepfer, 1985). Therefore, it is critical that middle level educators ensure that those students given such earlier learning challenges have really manifested the thinking level capacities required to learn that content information and master those skill areas.

Policymakers err when they assume that the norm of learning appropriate for a minority of intellectually precocious early adolescents can become the expected norm for large numbers of middle level school aged youngsters. Present data suggest that challenge alone cannot facilitate earlier learning of skills or information that require advanced learning skills. Research into why some individuals delay in developing and manifesting higher intellectual abilities until well into their adult years still has not been completed (Strahan and Toepfer, 1984).

Students who lack the cognitive abilities necessary to succeed in mathematics, for instance, can develop what is commonly known as "math anxiety." Their poor performance is often misinterpreted as the result of "not trying" or "failing to work to capacity." When poor performance is due to inappropriate placement, students may lose and shy away from their earlier interest in mathematics.

Students who are overchallenged or challenged inappropriately can become discouraged and may try to avoid mathematics courses later. They may also fail to discover they could have overcome their frustrations by attempting these courses again at a later time. This has negative self-concept and esteem implications as well. Delaying the wholesale placement of students in such courses for a year would allow many youngsters to develop the cognitive abilities necessary for successful learning.

In most states, mathematics is still one of the accelera-

tion areas in eighth grade. The findings of Fernand Prevost (1988a, 1988b) reveal that eighth grade students accelerated into algebra are usually the brightest and most able students in mathematics in that grade.

However, Prevost's data identify that a much higher percentage of students who begin algebra in ninth grade complete the full high school sequence than students who take algebra in eighth grade. Prevost's findings also show that those students who do complete algebra in eighth grade perform at significantly lower levels despite their high math abilities. Prevost's data support the development of eighth grade mathematics enrichment programs as a needed alternative to accelerating large numbers of eighth graders into algebra.

Program expectations that do not consider students' developmental readiness for higher learning challenges further erode the effectiveness of responsive middle level school programs for the gifted. Resultant acceleration of high school offerings into middle level schools often restricts or displaces exploratory and other program offerings that were responsive to the educational and developmental needs of individual gifted and talented early adolescent learners.

Measuring Cognitive Levels

Those bright students who were ready and who took algebra in the eighth grade benefited from that appropriate, early challenge. That is not true for other students who were prematurely placed into algebra while still not ready for formal thinking. Students so misplaced invariably experience frustration and develop degrees of "math anxiety" that can negatively affect their continuing study of mathematics.

The Arlin Test of Formal Reasoning can confirm such individual readiness and identify those students with delayed maturation who should wait a year for certain learning experiences. By that time, they should be able to catch up with those students who were ready a year earlier. For the gifted, it is important that long-term goals for success not be lost by insisting that all students move in a lock-step during the middle level school years. During these years such variance in intellectual maturation among some bright youngsters should be expected.

Middle level G/T programs can make good use of the Arlin Test. It can identify whether a youngster is a low concrete, high concrete, low formal, or high formal level thinker. It is helpful for identifying the readiness of youngsters to perform the particular thinking levels required to understand and process the cognitive level demands of specific subjects and can be administered to students in grades 5-7 in a single class period. With this identification, cognitive levels matching can be used to place students appropriately within middle level G/T offerings.

Herman Epstein (1981) observed that cognitive levels matching can identify and diagnose student cognitive levels, and organize learning activities matched with student readiness to learn facts and information. Such appropriate challenges can help students consolidate their manifested skills while initiating new ones as their readiness allows. Matching the level of learning challenge with demonstrated student cognitive level readiness can minimize inappropriate learning challenges.

Pressures on Students

Academic achievement among early adolescents vacillates during the middle level school years. Expectations of both parents and educators must be tempered by an understanding of thinking levels. Once a youngster is identified as a G/T student, any deviation from a continuing high achievement profile is all too often viewed punitively.

It is inaccurate to consider that youngsters are no longer gifted if their achievement varies as they journey through their school years. The emerging of peer group impact during the middle level school years is a serious problem for gifted students. The experience of being "drummed out" of a G/T course or the program, loss of face, friends, and status can be cataclysmic. Some students in gifted classes will end their social and personal relationships with those students who are removed from those programs.

Early adolescence is a time when sensitive and fragile developing egos can least bear such trauma. Again, the work of Beane and Lipka on the power of self-concept as learner upon school achievement must be understood by those who plan middle level school gifted programs.

Middle level school youngsters have a strong need for security as their early adolescent self-concept and esteem emerge. They begin to formulate their adult identity during this time. Because of peer pressure and their need for peer approval, middle level youngsters with both high I.Q. and abstract/formal thinking capabilities may, at times, achieve less than their best. These youngsters will often confide "it isn't cool to be an egghead." Even the most able middle level student may risk adult disapproval to gain peer approval.

Parents should not view these times with a sense of

failure or conclude their child is necessarily being disrespectful toward them or the school. Adults working with middle level school youngsters must understand the nature and extent of peer group influence on achievement during these years. Most middle level students, including G/T youngsters, will tie their behavior to peer relation issues and problems. To resolve these situations positively, students require patience and understanding from parents and adults in the school.

Failure to understand these issues can compound the pressures that bright early adolescents face. Increased pressures from unrealistic parent expectations can contribute markedly to misunderstandings and student development of serious personal-social problems.

We know that bright transescents, especially girls, are highly vulnerable to dietary illness (anorexia nervosa and bulimia) and emotional disturbance. Emotional problems of early adolescents are reflected in the increasing incidence of serious emotional illness, suicide, and suicide attempts during the middle level school years. (See Toepfer, 1986, for a discussion of the implications of these issues for middle level principals.)

Middle level youngsters seeking independence may sometimes give the impression that they neither want nor need parent and school adult approval. This surface behavior is a veneer. More often than not, this posture is an attempt to appear independent when, in fact, these youngsters still want some continued dependence on parents and school adults. Their failure to "fit in" at school and within peer social situations can create melancholy and anguish that can result in defiant behavior. When this occurs, adults must understand that these young people are not necessarily repudiating the closeness they exhibited during their elementary school years.

Bright, overchallenged middle level youngsters with peer acceptance problems need adult understanding to help them deal successfully with those problems, not increased pressures to improve their achievement. Middle level principals, counselors, and teachers must be prepared to help both parents and students deal positively with such situations. We must understand that even the most able students need help in coping with the problems that the dynamics of growth and adjustment bring during early adolescence.

Ability Grouping of Gifted Students

Current statements of ability grouping issues appeared in the January 1989 issue of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's *ASCD Curriculum Update*.

In response to a question about the merit of grouping students by ability, Don Hillman, curriculum specialist for the Frederick County (Md.) Schools stated:

> "The grouping debate is one area in education in which theory and practice agree. Research and our own observations have long been telling us to stop grouping students by ability. Ability grouping is counterproductive to the goals of public education, increased student achievement, self-esteem, and promotion of democratic ideals and mobile society."

Robert Slavin of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Johns Hopkins University, stated:

> "A decision to assign a child to an ability group or track will have far-reaching consequences, as grouping decisions made at one point in a child's school experience greatly influence later grouping decisions. At the elementary level, there is no research to suggest any benefit of between-class ability grouping, but within-class grouping (i.e., reading and math groups within the class) can be beneficial. At the middle school level there is still no known benefit to ability grouping, but acceleration programs for mathematically talented students may be effective. While ability grouping may sometimes be necessary, we should avoid it as much as posssible."

Beane, Toepfer, and Alessi (1986) discuss the broad and specific effects of ability grouping procedures. They found that homogeneous grouping, as currently practiced, does not have consistently positive value for students. Assigning students to high, average, and low-ability classrooms does not produce achievement gains over heterogeneous grouping patterns. However, the tracking of high ability learners into top groups in each academic subject promotes a number of concerns.

A student who does very well in mathematics and science, for example, often has her or his self-concept as a learner damaged by not being equal to such a challenge in English and history. This becomes debilitating to the point that performance in her or his ability areas frequently is negatively affected.

Students with high ability in each academic area also encounter deficits. First, they become isolated from intellectual stimulation with students other than their ability peers. Second, their opportunities to develop personal/social relationships narrow because of increasing isolation from the mainstream of the student body.

For these reasons, proposals for pull-out programs at the middle level should be carefully reviewed. Pull-out

programs may be desirable in the high school's efforts to stratify and specialize educational options for its most advanced, talented students, but this program conflicts with the middle level school's primary focus on general and exploratory education.

Middle level school programs for gifted and talented youth should never create conflict with the total developmental needs of those students. This option should be pursued only if it can be determined that the decision will not cause affective problems for those learners involved. Otherwise it will create pressures on them that far outweigh the intellectual advantages supposedly provided by the pull-out program.

Planning Middle Level G/T Programs

Principals should provide leadership in developing G/T programs that offer both broad and specific opportunities for middle level school youngsters. Stratification should not be allowed to erode the responsibility to nurture the special abilities of all students during their middle level school years. Middle level schools must develop responsive middle level G/T programs that serve both continuing and emerging special abilities of students. The following concerns and guidelines are suggested as middle level principals address that need.

- Develop a clear statement of the purposes for the middle level G/T program. Include a description of specific program objectives for coordinating the G/T program with the total middle level program.
- Identify and agree upon the differences between acceleration and enrichment in the middle level school's gifted and talented educational programs. Define the relationship between both approaches. Decide how they may be used to develop the least restrictive environments to meet the special talents and abilities of students.
- Develop grouping practices that relate to the developmental needs students exhibit during their middle level school years. Such procedures must discourage the development of elitist attitudes among students.
- Utilize a variety of instruments to identify student levels of thinking, areas of academic strength, special talents, interests, and creativity.
- Make placement decisions based on the overall and specific evidence of giftedness. This can be specified in the data gathered to answer the following questions.

1. Does placement in the G/T program eliminate an elective course?
2. What similarities and differences exist between gifted and enrichment classes and activities?
3. To what degree is creativity a focus in the G/T program?
4. Is the development of autonomous learners an anticipated outcome of the middle level G/T program?
5. Will divergent thinking be expected or developed in the program?
6. What level(s) of thinking are required to be in the program or specific aspects of the program?
7. What are the expectations for social maturity of students in the program?
8. In what ways will G/T students require special help in developing and maintaining peer relations with youngsters outside the program?

- Organize a well-defined program to inform parents and the community about differences between the middle level G/T program and those in the district's elementary and high schools.
- Examine implications for both broad and specific aspects of the G/T program as they relate to the total middle level school program.
- Develop procedures that allow students to enter, exit, and re-enter aspects of the program as their profile of interest and abilities changes during their middle level school years.

Conclusion

The current "state-of-the-art" provides middle level educators with a range of G/T program alternatives and definitions to assist in developing local programs. Before selecting any one approach for developing your middle level G/T program, identify the degree to which an approach matches the goals for responsive middle level education in your setting.

Educators should use the interface of that match as the starting point in either developing a middle level G/T program or reviewing and assessing existing efforts. From this perspective, the principal can work with the middle level staff to organize G/T programs that respond to and build on the special abilities, talents, and interests of middle level youngsters.

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The Ability/Achievement Dilemma of Gifted Middle Level Girls

Linda R. Kramer

Although educators emphasize students' developmental needs and the ways schools can organize to meet these needs, we know surprisingly little about what works best for gifted early adolescents.

What's more, few attempts to evaluate and improve gifted programs have moved beyond surveys designed to collect the impressions of participating teachers, students, and parents.

How gifted students see themselves within the middle school environment is unexplored territory.

We do know that social experiences are important determinants in the way students think of themselves and their abilities. As Lipsitz (1980) has noted, "young adolescents, at a critical stage of self-definition, take their signals from society at large and from the subculture. They are dependent upon social institutions like the school for the limitations or the boundlessness of their aspirations."

This is particularly true for females who are more sensitive to negative teacher or peer feedback, and who, as they grow older, tend to rate their abilities lower than males.

Indeed, theorists postulate that females, to a greater degree than males, define themselves in relation and connection to other people (Chrodorow, 1974; Gilligan, 1982).

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While reviews of the research on sex-related issues in achievement conclude that females' academic underachievement is a myth, researchers interested in gifted females define the problem differently. "Girls earn higher grades in school, yet men write more books, earn more degrees, produce more works of art, and make more contributions in all professional fields" (Callahan, 1979).

How do gifted preadolescent girls conceptualize ability and how do they feel about their own? What factors in the school environment, if any, influence their thinking?

The data presented here are taken from a study of gifted girls' experiences in one middle school in which they were members of a pull-out gifted program and heterogeneous teams. The study examines how the girls defined ability; how they used school experiences to construct their definitions; and the relationships among the girls and their team teachers, a category of data that emerged as significant to the gifted girls in the school.

Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness and Gifted Girls

To participate in a gifted program in this state, students needed an I.Q. score of 130 or above and a recommendation from parents or teachers. The girls included in this study represented a range of I.Q. scores from 131 to 140. Seven had entered a gifted program on or before third grade, and eight had spent the majority of their elementary and middle school experience in the same community.

While teachers were consciously aware that parental values and community expectations played roles in setting limits on the aspirations of all students, they were less clear about the school's ability to expand the opportunities available to them, and especially to gifted students.

The root of the problem was the label "gifted." Teachers' perceptions of giftedness were influenced by three factors that caused considerable confusion:

- First, because the gifted program was a one-day-per-week pull-out program, it infringed to a considerable extent on the regular curriculum.
- Second, teachers were concerned that participation in the program had a negative effect on participants and non-participants alike.
- Third, teachers were disturbed that students who were labeled gifted did not do as well or were not as motivated as other students whom teachers characterized as very bright. Thus, the concept of giftedness was a source of contention among the faculty members.

What information did the label "gifted" provide about individual students? The following comments illustrate the extent of the debate.

Teacher: My definition is that on Wednesdays and Fridays I'm missing a certain number of students. That's the only thing I know. They have to make up the work.

Principal: Gifted kids don't want to be different. That's what we do when we label them. People don't really understand the amount of pressure these kids are under. . . . I don't understand. It's just the way it seems to work. We've had kids tell us, "We just want to be in classes with our friends. We don't want to have to work that hard."

Exploratory Teacher: I think if you're gifted you should strive for perfection. It's as if these kids aren't trying to do their best. They're just trying to get by. I think a lot of the kids in there aren't gifted. I'm not sure what it is. We're failing to teach them following directions and organization. . . . [Gifted students] have self-control.

Teacher of the Gifted: We have a lot of trouble distinguishing between brilliance and achievement. . . . These kids are underachievers.

In discussions about the meaning of giftedness, many teachers referred to I.Q. scores and an enhanced ability to perceive relationships among diverse ideas.

The notion that gifted students should be productive, however, engendered self-doubt. When gifted students performed less well or less enthusiastically, it could only mean that either they were not gifted or that something was wrong with the curriculum. This issue of productivity was central to the differences teachers perceived between gifted girls and gifted boys.

The majority of teachers described the gifted girls they taught as less serious, less enthusiastic, and less outspoken than gifted boys. Yet, the same teachers also perceived the girls as having a greater interest in pleasing teachers and parents than gifted boys.

The general picture was that "gifted girls were just like all little girls growing up," with the possible exception of the girls teachers considered more motivated and brighter.

Librarian: Cindy is gifted but the rest (of the girls) are just real hard workers. You can tell when someone is gifted. They get something the first time you say it . . . . These girls are not free thinkers. You'd have a hard time convincing me they're gifted. (She illustrates this by comparing the romance novels checked out by gifted girls to the more content-based reading of the boys.) These girls are still into Judy Blume.

Teacher: I have trouble looking at these gifted girls as being gifted. (He suggests that among the gifted girls he teaches only Nancy may really be gifted. Her behavior, however, causes him to doubt this.) Her behavior isn't anti-social like the gifted boys' behavior. It's dishonest. When James doesn't do his homework, it's because he sees no reason. Because he knows it. Nancy tells me she did it but it got lost. The majority of the girls are interested in pleasing because it pleases the teacher.

The confusion surrounding the meaning of giftedness seemed enhanced when teachers spoke about girls identified for the program. Though teachers agreed that community expectations and parental values might differ for girls, and that girls were more concerned about pleasing teachers, the majority of teachers believed that they, themselves, did not treat the gifted girls any differently. During interviews and informal discussions with teachers throughout the five-month period of data collection there was no overt suggestion that, based on the above insights, there might be a need for differential treatment.

When Labels Become Liabilities

Cindy, the only gifted girl described by teachers as a producer, said, "I'd rather have teachers who don't expect too much. That makes it easier to please them and then their job isn't so miserable."

The mother of one gifted girl described one unhappy incident: "She was crying when she called (from school) but I didn't know anything about it so I just asked her what did she want me to do! When she got home, though, we put her on restriction," she explained. "She said [her project] wasn't done because Marie didn't come to school. I told her never to do a project with anyone again . . . . I told her I'd have her taken out of gifted which I can because maybe it's too much pressure on her. She says the teachers don't understand."

When labels are misunderstood or understood differently by participants in a social setting, the flow of communication is disrupted. It is analogous to watching a play in which the actors use threatening tones and gestures while uttering encouraging words. The audience is then faced with the dilemma of interpreting communication that doesn't match.

For the girls in this study the label of giftedness resulted in confusing expectations that they then used to construct their patterns of behavior in the classroom.

In a study of conceptions of ability, Nicholls (1986) found that important changes in the meaning of competence take place during early adolescence. In short, early adolescents come to equate ability with capacity and to devalue effort.

Nicholls concluded that defining ability as capacity may have important consequences on students' classroom performance. "The belief that one lacks ability (or is about to be revealed as lacking ability) should be more devastating for students who construe ability as capacity."

How does this picture change if early adolescents labor under the enigma of giftedness?

Participant-observers look for things that stand out in the environment and demand notice. Two domains of behavior repeated themselves throughout the study. For the girls in this school, beliefs about ability and achievement centered on getting the right answer and ways to know if the teacher likes/doesn't like you. Both domains resulted in specific classroom behavior.

For example, analysis of interaction patterns revealed that gifted girls rarely volunteered to answer questions or make comments during their regular classes. In addition, when students had the option of selecting seats, they most often sat in the rear of the room where the possibility of interaction with the teacher was minimized.

As one sixth grader explained, "I sit here because she (the teacher) never looks here." The fear of being singled out and failing to know the answer was especially intense for gifted girls if the class was one in which they perceived themselves to be most able.

They equated having ability with the capacity for right answers. Indeed, knowing the answer was, in large measure, their definition of giftedness. Though this belief may be related to developmental issues as Nicholls (1986) suggests, in this study the data indicate that ability as capacity is reinforced by narrow curriculum structure and teacher practices that emphasize one correct way.

Not knowing the answer during class discussions or lectures was a matter of serious concern to the girls. The confusion they expressed was characterized by fear of public disclosure that they, gifted students, did not know the answer and the additional fear of peer rejection if they appeared too bright too often.

The following excerpt, taken from a group interview with eighth graders, illustrates the extent to which they felt impaired by confusing expectations for gifted students:

- *Lynn:* The only reason we got in there is because we are more capable . . . .
- *Ellen:* We *were* smart when we were tested.
- *Lynn:* Because we're capable of doing more than we are but we don't do it!
- *Observer.* What makes you not do it?
- *Lynn:* (excitedly) It's difficult! It's really difficult for us! It's more difficult for us than for other students because they (teachers) expect us to know more!
- *Sally:* They'll be explaining something and they'll ask a [gifted] student a question, but we don't know how to do it. We've never seen it before, but they expect us to!
- *Debbie:* Especially one teacher . . . . He'll say, "Well, you're supposed to know it. You're in gifted."
- *Sally:* How are we supposed to know the stuff before we're supposed to know?

The girls perceived that getting the right answer was also seen as a sign of giftedness by their parents. Ellen explained, "My mom had a fit when I got a C in algebra. She said, 'You're in gifted and all that crap and you should be able to do anything.' My sister got a D and all my mother said was she couldn't watch TV."

With the exception of one student, the girls in this study believed that successful achievement resulted, in part, from positive acceptance by teachers, indicating that relationships with teachers had an impact on the girls' conceptions of ability.

This idea surfaced during individual interviews as well as during classroom interaction when teachers gave oral feedback on students' work. When feedback was positive it was often equated with being liked.

Evidence that this perception was not shared by all

was found in Lynn's remark, "Everyone has a best subject and mine is English. I doubt if I would do better in any of my classes even if I liked the teachers." Comments such as the following further illustrate the girls' attributions of success to teacher relationships:

- You can almost feel who is high (popular) in the team because if a teacher likes you, you can do a lot and you do well.
- If a teacher doesn't like your work you feel like they were giving you that grade because they didn't like you.
- If a teacher doesn't like gifted students, he says you aren't prepared.

Making Sense: Implications for Educators

Early adolescence is a time when important changes in conceptions of ability occur, a time when students begin to think that more effort means less ability. Evidence also suggests that gender-related role expectations may begin to influence achievement behaviors during early adolescence.

Girls who are labeled gifted undergo these changes in significantly different ways, due in part to educators' misunderstanding of the concept of giftedness. There is a critical need for better understanding, because the ways in which gifted girls see themselves are greatly affected by their relationships with teachers and the teachers' beliefs about giftedness.

When the concept of giftedness is not clearly understood, it may limit girls' potential achievement by actually closing off instruction to them instead of inviting them to learn. This occurs in a cycle.

When teacher belief that giftedness means excellent performance combines with a focus on one right answer or a single correct way, students' avenues to successful performance are restricted.

Rather than risk being exposed as inadequate or incompetent, the girls in this study withdrew unless they were sure of their answers. In some cases, they stopped trying as hard.

It is possible that the avenues to success are more restricted for gifted girls than boys because girls are more sensitive to teacher feedback and more focused on relationships with teachers.

To broaden learning opportunities for gifted students in the regular classroom, principals and curriculum specialists help teachers understand more clearly what is implied by "gifted." This can be accomplished through inservice focusing on curriculum strategies for high-ability or high-achieving students that can be implemented in classrooms with a wide range of abilities.

Principals should consider ways teachers meet the needs of high ability students and should actively encourage them. They should also engage their faculties in an examination of the goals of the school's gifted program. A critical evaluation of the program's effect on other school programs, as well as a hard look at ways gifted program goals can be integrated in the regular curriculum, would benefit students and teachers alike.

We know that teachers who "own" their school's gifted program are more likely to work effectively with gifted students in their classrooms. Principals who encourage this ownership broaden opportunities for gifted students.

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Interscholastic Athletics and Middle Level Education: To Have or Not To Have?

Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.

The appropriateness of interscholastic athletics versus intramural sports in American junior highs was debated sharply during the 1950s when junior highs sought to become more responsive to the unique and different educational needs of junior high youngsters. In the 1960s the debate became even more lively with the advent of the middle school.

Many early middle school exponents accepted intramurals only, and the case for both positions became polarized. Since 1970, however, the focus of middle level improvement efforts has again turned toward issues more basic to the improvement of education for youth. Hostilities have recently ended between extremists as a genuine middle level educational movement is drawing increasingly sharper focus on the uniqueness of middle educational needs. Attention is being given to identifying how generic middle level education can become more effectively responsive to the needs of middle level youngsters. As middle level schools attempt to get to the serious business of program and instructional improvement it is time to define what data suggest for the role of competition in all aspects of middle level learning.

Futurists present data indicating that managing the resources of the planet in the twenty-first century will require a collaborative thrust far beyond that which nationalistic competitiveness has provided in this century. This does not mean that life will not be competitive, but that the appropriateness of competition and the consideration of effective competition should be concerns that educators address in planning school programs. Youngsters who begin kindergarten in 1982 will exit twelfth grade in 1995. It is important that schools consider developing realistic and effective competitive attitudes and skills as part of school objectives.

To this end it is important that middle grade educators consider more carefully than ever before the evolving characteristics and capacities of middle level youngsters as developing humans and learners. Too often in the past, various programs that have had merit and true success in the high school have been introduced literally "lock, stock, and barrel" at the middle level with less effective results. Invariably, however, we have assumed that the fault was with the middle level youngsters rather than with the programs.

In measuring the success of competitive goals and activities in middle level schools, we tend to look only at those cases where early maturing students could and did achieve and "measure up" to our overexpectations. However, many of these early competitive "stars" fall by the wayside in the high school. We see all too many cases of youngsters with competitive interest in the middle level school who are overchallenged. Frequently, such students retreat to a level of spectator and nonparticipant and become adolescents and adults who shy away from competition and pressure.

If a current goal for education is to maximize competitive effectiveness for each individual, it must be

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remembered that not all middle level learners can be expected to have a common readiness for competitive programs. One cannot forget the opening line of the ABC television network's celebrated "Wide World of Sports." The goal in middle level education is to enable all youngsters to be able to handle "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" in every aspect of life. This seems particularly important as we consider the issue of interscholastic athletics in the middle grades.

A Middle Level Athletics Philosophy

While individual schools and districts have addressed this issue, many continue to borrow in largely wholesale fashion from high school programs and professional sport and community leagues for young athletes. Five areas of concern demand consideration.

1. *Emphasis in middle grade athletics needs to be distinct and separate from that of the high school and from other athletic interests.*

The range of physical, social, and emotional maturity of middle level youngsters cannot be taken too seriously. Both the four-foot-seven-inch 13-year-old, and the six-foot-three-inch youngster of the same age may be emotionally immature. Others of the same sizes and age may have precocious emotional stability and a capacity for pressure situations. Decisions about the range of offerings in middle level athletics must take this fact into consideration.

2. *Broad, intramural opportunities for middle grade students in competitive sports.*

In the past decade there has been increasing support for good intramural programs as a baseline for all middle level athletic programs. Learning to compete in a more restricted, nonthreatening environment allows for the development of general competitive initiative as well as the learning of sport fundamentals. The latter is found to occur when health, physical education, and recreation professionals on the middle level school staff are involved and committed to the intramural program. Where intramural programs have fared poorly, they have too frequently been organized without involvement of the HPER staff.

3. *Interscholastic competition for the talented elite in the middle grades.*

This is a viable component of the total middle level HPER program. However, sports medicine professionals can provide overwhelming data indicating that implementing the high school athletic program at the middle level is irresponsible and dangerous, at best.

Richard Redfearn, director of public health for Lenawee County, Mich., has written convincingly about the dangers of middle level interscholastic athletics. In addition to the problems of cost for such massive efforts, he states that many children do not have sufficient muscle mass and joint stability to withstand angulated stress until well after their junior high/middle school years. It is to be hoped that the public will base its community athletic decisions upon such injury data.

For example, one National Football League All-Pro running back, who is also a trained middle level special education teacher, feels that no youngster should play tackle football before approximately age 15. He states that both little league and middle level football equipment is modeled after the professional and college models. The player at those levels has a mature body with calcified bone structure. Many middle level youngsters with nonmature cartilage bone conditions can actually be injured by such pro-model equipment. Until equipment is conceived and designed that protects the growing skeletal-muscular structure of middle level youngsters, this professional star cannot endorse tackle football.

> To this end it is important that middle grade educators consider more carefully than ever before the evolving characteristics and capacities of middle level youngsters as developing humans and learners.

The success of interscholastic competition for the talented middle level learners can be seen in programs in many districts. Selectivity is the key characteristic of these effective programs. The students in these programs have the necessary physical, social, and emotional maturity as well as interest in such participation. In most cases these activities are not miniatures of the high school competition. The pressure of bands, cheerleaders, and adult spectators who boo and demean is avoided. Rules are appropriate for a "nonspectacle" setting. Learning to compete, succeed, and lose; improving skills; and setting goals are realistically approached. Schedules are not excessive and the best of coaching and officiating are provided.

4. *Instructional concerns in the total athletic program.*

Effective teaching and learning about sports skills will undergird the satisfaction and enthusiasm found by middle level participants. Performance, self-expression, and satisfaction should be goals of both

intramural and select interscholastic programs. A good instructional focus in intramurals will help to overcome many developmental problems common to the middle level years. It is also important that student expectations in the middle level years be realistic. For students who are ready for selective interscholastic competition, the refinement of fundamental skills and their execution will enhance satisfaction in competition. Overall enjoyment of such experience will be increased and provide a basis for carryover to high school and later life.

> Performance, self-expression, and satisfaction should be goals of both intramural and select interscholastic programs.

5. *Role of athletics in terms of the developmental needs of middle grade youngsters.*

The physical transformation experienced by most students during the middle level years is critical in and of itself and for the effect it has on the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the youngsters. Athletics can be a significant means for self-actualization in terms of developing personal confidence, gaining group and peer approval, and experiencing success and growth of proficiency in some kind of competition. To ensure the latter, it is absolutely necessary that different levels of challenge and difficulty be present in the program to accommodate the wide range of developmental profiles. This means that both team and individual athletic options must be considered in planning responsive middle level athletic programs.

More than 30 years ago, Robert Havighurst made an important point in his research in developmental tasks. Physical growth and its precocity or retardedness at any given age triggers expectations of youngsters by peers and adults alike. We develop social expectations for youngsters based upon their size, and often misread their age by their size. This is particularly true in the middle level years.

Some Recurring Data

We freely accept that buildings must be built from the foundation up. However, too often in educational planning we seek to work from the top downward. I know of no situation where a successful, balanced program has come from a school with a singular or heavy middle grade interscholastic athletic program. Successful practice, in terms of the issues discussed to this point, has required the careful establishment of a broad-based intramural program with a select interscholastic program as a final development. The term "balance" does not mean to imply a split in program emphasis or offering between these two elements. The interscholastic program is select and for an elite population, whereas the intramural program is important for all middle level students.

Schools seeking to offer this broad base must, in many instances, face cutting back a long-established, heavy interscholastic program. Community pride, the "alumni syndrome," and a range of other pressure groups may describe this as becoming "soft," lowering standards, and the like. These enthusiasts may quote the late Vince Lombardi, "winning is everything" (His actual words were, "The desire to win is everything."), and cite such other expressions as "middle level teams are a necessary base for successful high school teams." Existing data can now deflate such myths.

> Athletics can be a significant means for self-actualization in terms of developing personal confidence, gaining group and peer approval, and experiencing success and growth of proficiency in some kind of competition.

However, the "farm system" myth is one that continues to stand. To that end, I have gathered some base-line data on the reality of the need to have a strong middle level interscholastic athletic program as a base for a winning high school program. (Personal experience attests to one interesting situation. During two years at the University of Georgia I saw the best high school football in my experience. Clarke County [Athens, Ga.] is the state's smallest county, yet Clarke County plays in AAAA competition; the most difficult in the state. A perennial subregional finalist in football, Clarke County has been state champion in 2 of the past 10 years. In 1979 Clarke County was ranked number two in the nation's high school and prep school football listing. In addition to being the state's smallest county, there are *no* interscholastic athletics in the middle schools of Clarke County. Yet, Coach Billy Henderson takes ninth graders and molds a perennial powerhouse team.)

While a number of such isolated phenomena can be cited, what data exist to confirm such reality? The following data, gathered on two occasions from schools and school districts in six different states, are offered. Any district can gather similar information from its own records, or regionally through a cooperative effort.

School districts were asked to gather these data from students and from the student records of those who fell into two categories. One sample dealt with students in their senior year who had been varsity "starters" on middle level interscholastic teams. The other dealt with students who, as seniors, were "starters" on high school varsity teams. Samples were gathered in both instances for separate populations of football and basketball players. This was done in 1978 and in 1981.

The data were gathered as follows: Participating schools were asked to identify students who had been starting members of the middle level interscholastic varsity team in the sport in question. They then identified from that number (who had remained in the district through high school) those who made the senior high varsity. Senior students who were starters in their varsity, interscholastic sport were also identified. The school then identified from that population those students who were interscholastic players at the middle level; those who were starters; and those who did not play on middle level interscholastic teams. Figures I-IV display the findings gathered in 1978, and Figures Ia-IVa display the findings gathered in 1981.

These data were gathered from schools in four different states. While the sample is not broad, the consistency of the findings is interesting.

Conclusions

The data from both studies indicate that the number of middle level interscholastic football and basketball players who continue to succeed in their high school performance is amazingly low. Apparently the majority of superior high school level performers do not surface until after their middle level years. One explanation may be that the majority of elite middle level athletes were youngsters who were physically mature at an early age. They may peak and then be surpassed in high school by later-maturing adolescents.

Those who contend that a strong middle level interscholastic athletic program is necessary for a successful high school program are not supported by these findings. Redfearn's (1981) admonition of "too much too soon" is supported by these findings. Parizkova's (1973) data on the limited number of youngsters who possess both joint stability and adequate muscle mass also seem confirmed here.

Figure I

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Football Players on 7th and 8th Grade Middle Level Teams

I)	Number of Starters on Middle Level Teams	600
II)	Number from (I) Who Made Senior High Varsity	274
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Senior High Varsity	103

Figure II

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Football Players on 11th and 12th Grade High School Teams

I)	Number of Starters on High School Teams	600
II)	Number from (I) Who Were on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	221
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	154
IV)	Number from (I) Who Did Not Play Middle Level Interscholastic Football	379

Figure III

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Basketball Players on 7th and 8th Grade Middle Level Teams

I)	Number of Starters on Middle Level Teams	600
II)	Number from (I) Who Made Senior High Varsity	252
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Senior High Varsity	116

Figure IV

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Basketball Players on 11th and 12th Grade High School Teams

I)	Number of Starters on High School Teams	600
II)	Number from (I) Who Were on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	188
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	83
IV)	Number from (I) Who Did Not Play Middle Level Interscholastic Basketball	412

Figure Ia

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Football Players on 7th and 8th Grade Middle Level Teams

I)	Number of Starters on Middle Level Teams	400
II)	Number from (I) Who Made Senior High Varsity	178
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Senior High Varsity	69

Figure IIa

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Football Players on 11th and 12th Grade High School Teams

I)	Number of Starters on High School Teams	400
II)	Number from (I) Who Were on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	152
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	101
IV)	Number from (I) Who Did Not Play Middle Level Interscholastic Football	248

Figure IIIa

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Basketball Players on 7th and 8th Grade Middle Level Teams

I)	Number of Starters on Middle Level Teams	400
II)	Number from (I) Who Made Senior High Varsity	167
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Senior High Varsity	76

Figure IVa

Students Who Were Varsity Interscholastic Basketball Players on 11th and 12th Grade High School Teams

I)	Number of Starters on High School Teams	400
II)	Number from (I) Who Were on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	125
III)	Number from (I) Who Were Starters on Middle Level Interscholastic Teams	54
IV)	Number from (I) Who Did Not Play Middle Level Interscholastic Basketball	275

If the majority of star performers do not surface until high school, even the argument for teaching fundamentals to those middle level stars seems lacking. If fundamentals are taught in intramurals as part of the instructional thrust of HPER, greater benefit to all should be derived.

A philosophy of middle level athletics must stem from the reality that youngsters in this age group are becoming something different. They are in the most cataclysmic transformation of mind, body, and psyche that the human experiences. The data presented here and in the references clearly indicate that the physical and emotional rigors of interscholastic athletic competition on a broad scale at the middle level are far more harmful than beneficial.

Effective interscholastic athletic programs at the middle level must be selective in determining their appropriate, elite participants. Even then competitive rules must be adjusted appropriately as recommended earlier. Winning and losing, and learning to cope with each, must be placed in a perspective relative to the less stable and evolving emotional maturity of middle level youngsters. Further, these important lessons from sports can be approached for all through a broad-based, well-organized, and appropriately supervised intramural program. The interscholastic element must grow from such a broad-based program.

A philosophy of middle level athletics must stem from the reality that youngsters in this age group are becoming something different. They are in the most cataclysmic transformation of mind, body, and psyche that the human experiences.

This article presents one data base to bring to this long-standing area of controversy. The normative nature of this topic makes it possible for any school district to gather its own data. That data base, with the literature on this subject, should provide a frame to address local concerns of educators, parents, community, and alumni.

If findings are similar to those presented here, intramural programs will deserve a markedly higher

priority in terms of budget, time, facilities, and involvement of specialized personnel. In addition, local middle level interscholastic athletic programs should take on a refocused emphasis consistent with providing appropriate competition and experience for those youngsters really ready to benefit from such an activity.

If local data reflect a decline in the number of middle level star performers who continue to succeed in high school competition, another concern must be considered. That deals with helping the middle level interscholastic star to understand the importance of his present success and not to assume that this status will continue. Helping such youngsters to recognize that other of their peers may suddenly grow up and equal or surpass their present capacities is an important preparation for life.

Thus, as with every other component of middle level education, the athletic program must not lose sight of the need to help students gain the most from their middle level experience in preparing for the future. If we take adequate care of the problems of the "here and now" in middle level schools, the future will take care of itself.

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Middle Level Schools:

B

Curriculum

John Lounsbury asks the question, *"What Values Are We Teaching, Should We Teach, at the Middle Level?"* He has no argument with the school reform movement's call for schools to improve, but he disagrees with the methods and recommendations advanced.

Requirements, repetition, and rigidity, Lounsbury believes, may become the new three Rs, and they may create insurmountable barriers that will almost guarantee failure for many early adolescents whose need for education in the greatest.

His feelings are shared by the Clarks and Beane, and by the authors of *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* who describe education in many middle level schools as a "volatile mismatch" between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents.

According to Lounsbury, "excellence in ethics is the most-needed priority in American education today." He wonders about the overemphasis on skill development and the neglect of values education, and speculates that we could win the war of skill development and lose the war for civilized life. He believes the answer to "what values are we teaching?" comes from the actions we take and the examples we set, not from our words.

Wayside Teaching, as Lounsbury terms the response to a student's non-academic question, may be the most influential act a teacher performs all day.

As is typical of his writing, Lounsbury challenges middle level educators to think differently about curriculum. "Education is *not* a process in which somebody does something to or with somebody," he states. "It is not just a matter of acquisition. We must never forget that success in adult life will depend on personal attributes and behavior rather than purely intellectual ones." Finally he reminds us, "If students are the same persons they were when they entered middle school except for the addition of information, they have not been properly educated."

Thinking Skills

David Strahan, in *Beyond Basics: Assessing Thinking in the Middle Grades,* contends that while enriched thinking is a major goal of middle level education, it is also an area in critical need of improvement. Researchers in the area of reading report that while educators seem to have made progress in teaching the fundamentals of reading, they are not helping students think about what they have read. Other research shows students are deficient in analysis, synthesis, and

evaluation. Similar concerns extend to science, social studies, and mathematics.

A major critical concern, according to Strahan, is how to assess student progress in thinking skills and at the same time reduce the pressure of standardized assessment. The pressure for accountability and the perceived absence of rigorous alternatives to objective tests as assessments of student progress are also serious constraints. Strahan says many middle level teachers view the enrichment of thinking as a critical goal, but one to pursue after the tested topics are taught.

Strahan proposes two alternatives for assessing students' levels of thinking and growth in critical reasoning. They include:

1. Systematic analysis of writing samples
2. Structured observation procedures (discussion based procedures for assessing critical thinking)

Both of these alternatives provide information about students' strengths and weaknesses in critical thinking and can serve as starting points for enrichment activities.

In concluding the article, Strahan suggest that if we are to enrich thinking, educators must continue to develop and disseminate a procedure for integrating critical thinking into all facets of the curriculum.

Time on Task

Robert Shockley and J. Howard Johnston contend that one factor that is under the direct control of the school is time and how it is spent in the classroom. In *Time on Task: Implications for Middle Level Instruction*, they define and discuss the following terms:

1. Allocated time
2. Engaged time
3. Academic learning time.

While the amount of time is controlled by school administration, board policy, and/or legislative action, the *quality* of instructional time is clearly related to teacher behavior, student behavior, and instructional strategies.

Shockley and Johnston discuss some effective time-use strategies such as coping with disruptions, using overviews, and controlling attention. They conclude the article with eight suggestions for improving teacher time use and six suggestions about the administrator's role in improving the use of instructional time.

Mathematics at the Middle Level

Fernand Prevost, in *Algebra Isn't The Answer: Alternatives To Enrich Eighth Grade Mathematics*, discusses whether algebra is the best choice for enriching the mathematics experience of bright eighth grade students.

This question grew out of an exhaustive study of mathematics, science, and computer science education in New Hampshire schools. While he cites the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards that recommend enrichment rather than acceleration, Prevost says that others insist that elementary algebra can, should, and must be the eight grade mathematics course for the **average** student.

Using data from the New Hampshire study, Prevost suggests that exposure to algebraic concepts before students are intellectually ready often leads to frustration and unwillingness to enroll in additional mathematics courses in high school. He concludes by pointing out that programs such as algebra, designed to serve mathematically precocious students (top 3–5 percent), frequently end up serving 25 to 33 percent of the eighth graders. He urges caution and encourages middle level educators to design challenging alternatives.

MAY 1987

What Values Are We Teaching, Should We Teach, at the Middle Level?

John Lounsbury

What paradoxes humans present: persons and instruments orbiting the earth, yet war in the Middle East, a wall still in Berlin, ghettos in every major city. Food is stockpiled, yet millions are dying of hunger. Man has learned how to swim through the water like a fish; he has learned how to fly through the air like a bird; he has even learned how to traverse outer space as has no known creature, yet he still struggles to walk the earth like a man.

Educational Excellence and the Three Rs

But even if the condition of mankind is paradoxical, a mixture of pluses and minuses, those of us with open eyes and open hearts cannot rest comfortably with things as they are. As educators we should and must pursue excellence.

"Excellence"—the educational buzzword of the '80s. It is bandied about loosely and all too frequently. It sounds good, it has an aura of righteousness about it, and is so universal in its appeal as to be nearly noncontroversial.

Yet what does it really mean? Like "quality education," which it seemed to replace, it can mean almost anything a user wants. It is so rhetorical and is used to justify everything from narrowly conceived compensatory education to enrichment through the humanities.

Most commonly, of course, it is used as a label for efforts to raise educational standards, to increase academic achievement, and to improve the level of our youth's skills.

I'm for such goals, although I usually disagree with the methods recommended for achieving those goals. In fact, I sincerely worry over what I see happening as a result of the reactions to the rash of educational critiques released in recent years.

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Certainly I have no argument with the goal of the school reform movement. I devote all my efforts to school improvement. Schools, as good as they may be, are obviously not good enough.

Every newscast on radio and TV and every daily paper provides additional examples of the reality that vast numbers of young people, students in or graduates of our schools, are not able to deal properly with the many problems and varied decisions that all teenagers and adults are called upon to make in this day and time.

Inability to cope, to relate, to deal with one's own emotions, to assume personal responsibility, to find satisfaction and meaning in life leads to drug abuse, the excessive consumption of alcohol, violence, crime, child abuse, and suicide, to mention the more obvious of the inappropriate ways of meeting the demands inherent in contemporary life.

But while I agree that schools need improving and I, too, cry out for excellence, I disagree with the methods and recommendations advanced by many lay reformers and even with the responses of many professional educators.

This is especially true when the efforts focus on the middle level.

A fetish over the 3 Rs narrowly conceived, leads to naive, simplistic reform efforts. Improper definitions of the academics and excellence have led to distorted views of what is really important and what the education of early adolescents is all about.

There is a danger that the reform movement will do serious damage to middle level education—a case of the cure being worse than the disease. We could move from middle schools that demand too little to what amounts to *scholastic reform schools*.

Sincere concern over the seriously deficient skill levels of so many young people often leads boards of education and other well-meaning groups to back the most

readily available and seemingly logical solutions.

Such solutions are seldom effective. Negative attitudes toward youth in general and minority youth in particular, I regret to say, sometimes seem hidden in the demands for excellence.

Requirements, repetition, and *rigidity,* which may become the new 3 Rs, could create insurmountable barriers that will almost guarantee failure for many whose need for education is greatest.

We do need higher expectations, to be sure, and I call regularly for a pervasive school climate of high expectations. We do need standards, but they must be supported by the means of achieving them. We must guard against the possibility of turning our schools into institutions that perpetuate poverty rather than are means of moving out of it.

For the lower third of our students, the typical reform recommendations are largely invalid. This significant segment, now often called the "at-risk" students, is a growing group. The rate of dropouts in many states has increased in the last five years, and will likely continue to increase as get-tough reforms are instituted at the very time when demography and sociology are presenting schools with an increased number of students who are poor and ill-prepared for traditional formal schooling.

Excellence in Ethics

There is an area of education that is of the greatest importance and ought to have the label of excellence attached to it as well, an area that is more basic than the basics—ethics.

Excellence in ethics is the most needed priority in American education today. The cries for excellence in academic proficiency heard at every hand should be applied with the same vigor and intensity to the ultimate arena of human existence, to excellence in ethics.

While the deficiencies of our youth in the basic skills are real and deserve a frontal attack of the first magnitude, values are more basic than the basics.

We could, I fear, win the battle of skill development but lose the war of civilized life. Consider this proposition. Suppose by noble and intensive efforts, as well as by many minor miracles, every youngster in America was brought up to grade level in reading by the first of June. What effect would this monumental achievement have on America and the problems that plague her? Very little.

Our contemporary culture is blighted seriously in so many ways, ways that involve young people—even middle schoolers: crime, suicide, drug use and abuse, runaways, vandalism, fraud, deceit, unbridled selfishness, pessimism, alienation, loneliness, permissiveness.

Despite our wealth and technological expertise, despite our heavy spending in education and social services, crime, especially juvenile crime, is increasing and domestic violence ending in death is a daily occurrence in every major city.

Any newspaper provides a litany of social ills that are only tangentially related to the skill levels of the perpetrators. The causes of aberrant behavior lie in other areas.

America's skill ills are not nearly as serious as her moral leukemia. Moral responsibility is the oldest basic of all in this country. Though shared by the home, the church, and the community, civic ethics, fundamental values, and character development are the business of middle level schools. And the good news is that accumulating research shows the greatest academic and skill achievement at the middle level comes when schools directly concern themselves with attitudes, personal development, and socialization.

Education is a moral enterprise and middle school teaching is inherently a matter of morality. It cannot be otherwise, for all human behavior involves valuing. It is not a matter of whether we should teach values or not, but rather a matter of what values are we teaching.

Values Education at the Middle Level

The key question, then, is *what values are we teaching?* What values are self-evident to pupils? Who are our heroes? What do we honor? What values are implicit in our operational policies and procedures? What values are taught by what we don't teach as well as by what we try to teach?

These are questions that call for serious soul-searching. We do have to be careful because our values are showing. Indeed, they are not just showing, they are being learned! And when we face this reality we may be a bit embarrassed. Though not done intentionally, in most of our schools we are teaching implicitly some things that conflict with our explicit goals, our stated purposes.

Consider, for example, what values are inherent in our grading systems. What do our tests say the real objectives of our schools are? What do students learn really counts? Do our grading systems support our goal of building positive self-esteem? Does the reporting system correlate well with the broad objectives our public statements say we are concerned about?

Then what about our discipline codes? What values are inherent in them? Are they based on negative assumptions about the nature of early adolescents? Do they simply specify consequences for assumed misbehavior rather than confirm positive expectations? Do they encourage kids to learn how to beat the system and

how to cope with the bureaucracy?

Does our excessive reliance on extrinsic motivation devices dull youth toward knowing the true joy of learning and lead toward developing "reward junkies"?

Do the ways we teach young people in school present learning as a very literal thing? Is the single right answer overemphasized to the detriment of creative thinking?

Do our procedures, regulations, and demands teach young people compliant behavior even as we profess to be seeking individualization and initiative?

Do our grouping practices teach young people that some of them are worth more than others? Consider what lessons are ingrained in that youngster who spends all day in the lowest sections. What sort of self-concept can be developed in such circumstances?

What do students learn about our values from the almost nonexistent voice they usually have in developing the rules under which they live in school?

The old aphorism, "What you do speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say" continues to be valid.

The moral education that we really teach comes from our behavior, not our words. The lessons of most importance to early adolescents have little relationship to "education" as it is conceived by most adults. *The curriculum of climate may be more influential and important than the curriculum of content.* They may not remember what we teach them, but they'll remember how we treat them.

The Value of Wayside Teaching

Formal organized instruction is and ought to be the major component of the educational process. It deserves our best attention and our most thoughtful planning. The important place that planned instruction has in the school day is evident; bells signal the beginnings and the endings of time allotments established for planned instruction and the school day is almost completely given over to it.

While not seeking to deprecate this formal teaching or diminish its primary place in the educational enterprise, I believe there is much more to middle level education than organized instruction.

The more influential aspect of middle school education is often what might be called *wayside teaching*: the teaching that is done between classes, when walking in the halls, after school, and in dozens of one-on-one encounters, however brief.

For principals, wayside teaching is usually the main means of teaching. When all is said and done, what is said informally and casually may have more impact on a student's or a teacher's behavior than what is said formally while instructing a class or conducting a faculty meeting.

A response to a student's non-academic question, given spontaneously and without particular forethought, can have great impact; such a response may be the most influential act a teacher performs all day. Wayside utterances are often heard at a deeper level than classroom pronouncements.

Middle level teachers fortunately do not think of themselves as "on duty" only when standing in front of a class. The casual walk with a student or two on the way to a student council meeting is recognized as an opportunity to develop the kind of personal relationship that underlies true excellence in middle level education.

The unplanned after-school encounter with a discouraged student is seized as an occasion to express caring and offer a reassuring word. Even a surprise meeting in the mall on a Saturday is seen as a chance to communicate a genuine interest in a student as a worthy person.

As middle level educators we cannot evade the obligation that is inherent in our personal example. We may not dwell on it a great deal—that would seem self-righteous and egotistical—but we should be sensitive to the effect our behavior has on students.

Our conscious influence, when we are on dress parade, instructing the entire class, playing the role of teacher, may be relatively small compared to the impact of our wayside teaching. The silent, subtle radiation of one's personality, the effects of one's spontaneous words and unplanned deeds apart from those times when one is in front of the class, have great impact.

Then, too, even when in class and "on stage" teaching, what pupils are learning may not coincide with the planned lesson. Their eyes may be on us but their minds may be miles away. They are as likely to be assessing our clothing, our complexion, our candor, or our character as the content we are presenting.

They may be dreaming about what they would like to be, or deeply engrossed in rehearsing the one-liner they would deliver to the cute girl they pass in the hall between classes. It is not always easy to know just what they are thinking.

Early adolescents, kaleidoscopic kids—they can keep you young or age you quickly. It is a time of life when youth is stranger than fiction.

Middle schools must recognize how incomplete is their teaching of the advertised curriculum and how influential is their teaching of the hidden curriculum.

Improving Students—Improving Schools

What pupils become is what they have been taught to become—not formally taught, perhaps, but what

they have learned from the examples of adults.

If our youth are irresponsible as often charged, it is because the examples of adults led them to that posture. They weren't born that way. As Maureen Applegate phrased it so beautifully and simply many years ago: "Children of all nations are alike, until adults teach them."

Paraphrasing a few lines from that familiar "Children Learn What They Live" by Dorothy Nolte, we can say if transescents are taught with ridicule, they learn to be shy, but if they are taught with tolerance, they learn to be patient. If they are taught with criticism, they learn to condemn, but if they are taught with approval, they learn to like themselves.

Character is like measles. It can only be caught by close contact with someone who has it.

So often we, both teachers and the general public, confuse formal schooling with education itself and misunderstand what comprises an education.

Education is *not* a process in which somebody does something to or with somebody. It is not just a matter of acquisition. We must never forget that success in adult life will depend on personal attributes and behavior rather than purely intellectual ones.

The real curriculum, the take-home curriculum, includes much, much more than the collective courses of study. Student life, student-faculty relationships, and school policies and procedures all constitute teaching influences. We must recognize the influence of the school as a social system, to what its institutionalism teaches.

Education is really a process of self-development. But what definition of education is learned by pupils as we shuffle them from class to class to learn discrete bits of information?

If your students are the same persons they were when they entered the middle school, except for the addition of information, they have not been properly educated.

Students are not enrolled just to learn more, but to *be* more. Ultimately students assess the options and decide on their own instructional goals. Proper decisions result primarily from their attitudes and aspirations rather than from the correctness of the curriculum as presented by the faculty. Learning is an individual, personal responsibility, and it is value-driven.

In the Sea of Japan there is an unusual species of blowfish. It appears in the waters only once every 11 years, and is considered a great delicacy. While highly sought for its special succulence, it contains a deadly poison. The chef must remove the poison—all of it. If he does it right, it's the best meal you'll ever eat, *but* if he prepares it wrong, it's the last meal you'll ever eat.

As educational leaders, are we not all chefs of a sort with the ingredients of an abundant and satisfying school life available to us, ranging from teaching faculties to support staff to a host of technological advancements such as computers to the results of research?

Our schools, for the most part, are well-equipped and comfortable. Never have we had so much affluence, so many options, so many opportunities, goods, and services at our disposal.

But these same ingredients and opportunities may be underused or misused and become instruments and occasions for belittling students, labeling them, teaching them things contrary to our stated objectives—in short, poisoning students. The difference lies in the attitudes and motives of each one of us, the kind of chefs we are.

The morality of men, women, and children is the key ingredient in a productive and satisfying life. And the values of our schools are showing. Be sure they represent the beliefs we intend to teach—integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, respect for the rights of others, civility, self-control, open-mindedness, the common good.

We need to apply our best educational efforts to developing values, that America might progress in morals as well as money, that our students might not only be grammatically correct, but that they would also be good.

The middle school is the best place, perhaps the *only* place in which the renewal we need as a people can begin and take root in the coming generations.

If youth are to be more articulate, more knowledgeable, more responsible, if their values are to be more humane, it is at the middle level, not at the high school level, that such goals must be addressed.

As principals of these key grades you are part of the most important group in our land. The opportunity is ours, the task is clear. Let us begin anew with increased understanding about what we really teach.

FEBRUARY 1983

Beyond Basics: Assessing Thinking in the Middle Grades

David B. Strahan

One of the traditional goals of middle level education has been the expansion of students' critical reasoning abilities. Educators have long described the middle grades as years of transition from the basic learning of primary grades to the more content-oriented high school program. Old sayings such as, "In primary grades students learn to read; in middle grades they read to learn," reflect this tradition.

With the increased advocacy of middle schools in the past two decades, this traditional emphasis has grown to encompass a wide range of instructional goals that reflect the needs of transescent learners. Curriculum guidelines for grades five through eight stress "processes" and "explorations" in learning, and emphasize the expansion of critical and creative thinking (Lounsbury and Vars, 1978; Klingele, 1979; Toepfer, 1981). In spite of this shared commitment of middle level educators to facilitate growth in thinking, however, recent national assessments indicate that middle level students are not learning to think critically as well as they might. The findings have important implications for modifying testing procedures used in middle grades.

A number of recent research reports indicate dissatisfaction with current efforts to teach students how to think. In a review of recent research, Johnston and Markle (1981) indicate the need to improve the development of problem-solving skills. This report and others suggest that while enriched thinking is a major goal of middle level education, it is also an area in critical need of improvement.

This need is demonstrated even more powerfully by the recent report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Three National Assessments of Reading: Changes in Performance, 1970–80*. A comparison of reading achievement test data from 1971, 1975, and 1980 indicates that during the 1970s, the overall reading performance of 9-year-old students rose significantly in all areas of reading tested, while 13-year-olds registered only a slight increase in literal comprehension. The inferential comprehension of 17-year-olds declined significantly.

Two critical trends are noted on more open-ended assessments of reading, reflection, and writing of a different sample of more than 100,000 students conducted by NAEP (*Reading, Thinking, and Writing*, 1981). Very few students at any age explained their initial ideas and judgments through reference either to the text or to their own feelings and opinions. The evidence cited by older students does not reflect effective strategies for approaching a text; explanations remained superficial and limited. The overwhelming majority of students lacked strategies for analyzing or evaluating in the interest of deepening their understanding of what they read.

The report further states:

> The most significant finding from this assessment is that while students learn to read a wide range of material, they develop very few skills for examining the nature of the

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> ideas that they take away from their reading. Though most have learned to make simple inferences about such things as a character's behavior and motivation, for example, and could express their own judgments of a work as "good" or "bad," they generally did not return to the passage to explain the interpretations they made (p. 2).

After a detailed analysis of students' performances on objective test measures and written essay responses, the authors note that:

> By age 17, most of the students assessed are able to answer multiple-choice questions requiring either literal or inferential skills. Most are also able to summarize passages and demonstrate the mechanical and grammatical writing skills they would need if they learned how to write more extended answers.
>
> What the majority seem to lack is experience in undertaking such explanatory tasks and the problem-solving strategies and critical-thinking skills that would develop through such experience. They do not appear to have learned how to look for evidence for their judgments, whether by systematically analyzing some aspect of the passage or by referring to their own ideas and value systems (p. 2).

These reports also document declines in student interest in reading from ages 9 through 17; a decline in student knowledge of literary classics; and the general absence of systematic approaches to analytic writing tasks. The authors urge schools to put more emphasis on structured discussion, writing, and problem-solving activities.

Emphasis on Basic Skills As a Contributing Factor

The results of these assessments suggest that many teachers are succeeding very well in their efforts to teach basic skills, but not so well in attempts to go beyond basics to critical thinking. In analyzing these assessments and other test scores, Richard Anderson, director of the University of Illinois Center for the Study of Reading, suggests that educators have made progress in teaching the fundamentals of reading but not in helping students think about what they have read.

Anderson (1981) reports observational studies that indicate a tendency of many teachers to teach basic skills even when students have a good grasp of them, to spend little time facilitating comprehension, and to devote the largest portion of class time to skill-based, "workbook" activities.

Other analysts share his concern. Petrosky (1981) observes:

> I am concerned that the downward trends in reading of 13 and 17-year-olds, particularly in the area of inferential comprehension, are signaling deteriorating resources and instruction for those higher-order intellectual abilities that go beyond basic skills. If these trends continue into the 1980s, then it seems plausible that we are failing to give these students anything but basic skills (p. 48).

Yesner (1981) adds:

> Much of the "reading" that is taught and tested, though labeled functional and necessary for "survival," often seems irrelevant, mechanistic, and dull. In fact, this emphasis may actually be contributing to an unsought-for end—disinterest and avoidance of reading and a seeking out and reliance on more immediate sources of pleasure like TV (p. 48).

While these analyses focus on students' needs for more effective instruction in inferential reading comprehension, the limitations of basic skills instruction extend to other curricular areas as well. A National Assessments of Science study indicates that most students aged 13 through 17 are deficient in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Similar concerns extend to social studies and math.

Middle level educators must continue to explore more effective means to enrich critical thinking in all academic areas of the middle level curriculum. Since students seem to be demonstrating progress in the fundamentals of learning, new efforts to go "beyond basics" may prove especially productive.

Limitations of Predominant Assessment Procedures

One critical concern in progressing beyond basics is how to assess student progress in thinking more effectively and, at the same time, reduce the pressure of standardized assessments. The National Assessment of Reading and Literature offers five suggestions for school administrators: modifying testing programs, encouraging writing in subject areas, providing students with systematic writing instruction, increasing institutional support for teachers, and providing systematic inservice training in teaching writing and facilitating thinking. While efforts in all areas are critical, one of the most productive endeavors may well be the revision of testing programs.

As *Reading, Thinking, and Writing* suggests:

> Tests are a direct reflection of what is valued by the school. If teacher-made tests, as well as standardized examinations, rely exclusively on short-answer formats, the message will be clear to teachers and students alike. Essay questions that require students to explain their points of view should be a regular part of any testing program (p. 4).

The report further notes the relationship between testing and classroom instruction:

> These findings seem to us a direct reflection of current emphases in testing and instruction. In the classroom, teachers following traditional patterns of whole-class teaching and recitation move quickly from student to student so that many students can be involved without any one student dominating. The result is a pattern of teacher-dominated questioning in which brief comments from individual students are solicited and extended discussion

> is deliberately curtailed. Such techniques can be very effective in conveying an approved or conventional understanding of a difficult passage, but give individual students little opportunity to learn to formulate extended and detailed interpretations.
>
> The relatively short responses encouraged in classroom discussion parallel the multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank formats that dominate standardized and teacher-developed tests. When doing well in most school contexts requires little beyond short responses, it is not surprising that students fail to develop more comprehensive thinking and analytic skills (p. 2).

These observations describe some of the ways predominant assessment procedures constrain the enrichment of critical thinking.

Two other constraints are especially critical in middle level education. One is the pressure for accountability. National Assessment reports and a number of other investigations suggest that teacher-dominated questioning and short-answer, skill-based exercises do result in gains in achievement and standardized measures.

This phenomenon is well documented in Stallings' (1979) investigation of teacher effectiveness in which drill and practice, structured discussion of homework, and direct instruction of skill assignment were significant correlates of student gain scores in reading. In situations where teachers feel pressured to achieve such gains, it is again not surprising that students fail to develop more comprehensive thinking and analytic skills or, in some cases, that teachers teach to the test.

The second critical constraint on the enrichment of critical thinking is related to the pressure of accountability: the perceived absence of rigorous alternatives to objective tests as assessments of student progress. While many educators are aware of the limitations and constraints of objective tests, they continue to depend almost exclusively on such measures because they need to document achievement and they are not sure how else to do so. In many middle level classrooms the enrichment of thinking is often an "extra" in the curriculum, viewed as a critical goal but one to pursue after tested topics are taught, and one that "cannot really be measured."

Alternative Assessment Procedures

In order to move beyond basic skills and more fully integrate critical thinking with content teaching, educators must develop a range of assessment procedures that can supplement objective tests as measures of accountability. Two such alternatives have demonstrated considerable potential for assessing students' levels of thinking and growth in critical reasoning: systematic analysis of writing samples, and structured observation procedures.

Systematic Analysis of Writing Samples

While many teachers routinely assess student essays for mastery of academic content and evidence of writing skills, writing samples can also provide assessments of critical thinking levels. Such assessments can then be used as indicators of student progress in developing more sophisticated patterns of thinking.

One excellent example of the systematic analysis of writing samples to evaluate critical thinking is the procedure developed by Westinghouse DataScore Systems for use by the National Assessment of Reading and Literature (NAEP, 1981). As a means for scoring student responses to reading, thinking, and writing tasks, Westinghouse constructed a series of scoring guides and trained readers to use these guides to evaluate paragraphs written by students in response to poems and prose passages. As suggested by the authors of the report:

> Although the use of a variety of types of tasks and scoring guides increases the expense and complexity of the open-ended scoring task, it nevertheless provides a more comprehensive means of assessing students' abilities to respond to written works (p. xii).

By collecting a range of student responses to varied tasks and scoring them with guides written for each task, researchers were able to analyze open-ended writing samples to gauge critical thinking abilities.

Five different areas of critical thinking were assessed by using five different types of responding tasks. Scoring procedures were developed for each type of task. The five different tasks assessed are as follows.

- *General responding tasks.* Students were given very little explicit focus for their responses to these passages, and scoring guides were constructed to provide descriptive categories. Response categories scored were egocentric, personal, emotional, retelling, inferencing, generalization, analysis, reference to other works, and evaluation.
- *Inferencing tasks.* Students were required to describe the intent of the author, the mood of the passage, or the character of the protagonist. Scoring was based on both qualitative and descriptive factors.
- *Emotional responding tasks.* Students were asked to describe feelings suggested by the readings. Scoring was based on both qualitative and descriptive factors.
- *Analytic responding tasks.* Students were asked to analyze readings for theme and to discuss ways in which features of the text contributed to theme. Responses were then qualitatively ranked.
- *Evaluative responding tasks.* Students were asked to evaluate readings and state criteria used. Scoring was based on ability to use criteria.

In this investigation, the use of the scoring guides provided a systematic means of assessing a wide variety of reading and thinking responses. Scores obtained by using the guides also proved highly reliable, with percentages of scorers' agreement ranging from 93 percent to 98 percent.

By using these and other scoring guides as prototypes, middle level teachers may readily develop critical thinking exercises and scoring procedures. The periodic administration and scoring of such exercises could then provide an index of student development in the areas assessed and, at the same time, provide students additional experience in varied critical thinking activities.

Structured Observation Procedures

Using interview tasks and other problem-solving activities developed in clinical research, several educators have developed discussion-based procedures for assessing critical thinking. While they lack the rigorous controls of traditional individual interviews, these procedures may be readily used by classroom teachers to observe and record student responses in a systematic fashion. Critical thinking exercises can be incorporated into group discussions, and teachers can use cassette recordings to monitor progress in responding to varied problem-solving activities.

One such procedure is the "Language Arts Test of Cognitive Functioning" (Brazee, 1981). Developed at the University of Northern Colorado Lab School, this procedure uses six anecdotal problem-solving tasks as a starting point for describing middle level students' thinking on discussion-based activities. Different types of thinking assessed include logical analysis, social problem solving, sequencing, interpretation, and comparison/contrast. Analysis of student responses provides both a global measure of concrete/formal thinking and a description of student approaches to structured thinking tasks.

Another structured observation procedure is Naturalistic Protocol Analysis (Strahan, forthcoming). Developed in an investigation of fifth and sixth graders' problem-solving strategies, Naturalistic Protocol Analysis provides a means for assessing open-ended responses to critical thinking exercises. By recording students' comments in group discussions and collecting written responses, teachers can generate descriptors for students' approaches to the exercises presented.

Those descriptors can then be used as categories for analyzing patterns of response and assessing progress in selected dimensions of critical thinking.

Using this procedure, researchers described four different strategies used by students when solving problems effectively and five different patterns of "errors." Such strategy and pattern descriptors can provide starting points for monitoring student progress in critical thinking.

The following analysis of some student responses to one of the exercises used in this investigation is provided as an example.

Problem #1

At a meeting of the television news staff, the weather reporter was told that her material was too dull. That night she made up for it.

"Good evening. Today's weather, as you have probably noticed, is different from yesterday's. If the weather is the same tomorrow as it was yesterday, the day after tomorrow will have the same weather as the day before yesterday. But if the weather tomorrow is the same as today, the day after tomorrow will have the same weather as yesterday. As you know, it's raining today, and it rained on the day before yesterday."

Was it raining or clear yesterday?

Source: *Thinklab*, Science Research Associates, 1974.

Responses of Fifth and Sixth Grade Students

Tom: It's raining because the story implied it.

David: Clear—it said so in the story.

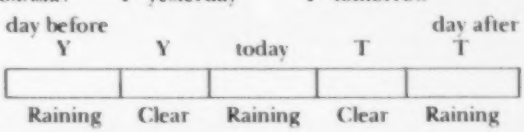
Evan: Clear—because it was clear every other day.

Wendy: You can't tell because she didn't say what tomorrow will be like.

Shannon: It's raining yesterday because the weather is the same as tomorrow and tomorrow is the same as today and it's raining today.

Rob: It will be clear because she said that today is raining and if she had said that tomorrow would be raining she could have said tomorrow would be the same as yesterday.

Christie: Y–yesterday T–tomorrow



So yesterday was clear.

Daryl: Clear yesterday because of rain today.

Marc: If today's weather is different from yesterday's and it is raining today, it was clear yesterday.

Responses indicate that Tom, Wendy, and Shannon had difficulty with this particular problem. The other students generated a "correct" solution but did so with varying degrees of sophistication. David, Evan, and Rob generated only partial explanations for their answers, demonstrating limited usage of systematic strategies.

Christie used an "experimentation" strategy in which she diagramed the sequence of pertinent facts from the passage. While this strategy worked, it was not as efficient as the abstraction employed by Daryl and Marc. Marc's response demonstrates an ability to form a generalization, eliminate extraneous information, and identify essential concepts. His response also demonstrates an ability to express these concepts in propositional form.

Research Summary:

Student Perceptions of Classroom Climate and Achievement in Science

Is there a relationship between the way junior high students view the psychological and social environment of the classroom and their achievement? Barry J. Fraser and Darrell L. Fisher studied 1,083 junior high students in 116 Australian science classrooms to find out. (*American Educational Research Journal*, Winter 1982, pp. 498–518).

Previous research suggested that student perceptions of their classrooms could be used to predict large amounts of variability in learning outcomes. Often, this variance exceeded what would have been expected because of student entering characteristics, such as general ability or pretest performance.

In this study, the researchers sought to discover the relationship that existed between student achievement of specific learning outcomes and the following dimensions of classroom environment:

- personalization (emphasis on interaction between individual students and the teacher);
- participation (active rather than passive learning behavior);
- independence (students making decisions and exercising control over learning and behavior);
- investigation (use of inquiry and problem-solving approaches);
- differentiation (selective treatment of students on the basis of learning style, ability, and rate);
- involvement (student participation and active interest);
- affiliation (students working together and developing sense of group belonging);
- teacher support (teacher helping students with class work);
- task orientation (focusing on completion and quality of tasks);
- competition (students competing for grades and recognition);
- order and organization (emphasis on order, quiet, politeness, and structure);
- rule clarity (rules stated clearly, consequences known and inevitable);
- teacher control (teacher monitors and enforces rules);
- innovation (teacher plans new, varied activities encouraging students to think creatively).

The researchers found that students better understood the social implications of science when class environments were characterized by participation, task orientation, and order and organization. Enjoyment of science was tied to personalization, participation, involvement, teacher support, order and organization, and rule clarity.

In other words, the students seemed to enjoy being in a class that was well organized, individualized, supportive, and active. The students were more apt to adopt scientific attitudes in classes characterized by participation, differentiation, affiliation, and task orientation; while leisure interest in science was connected with those environmental variables as well as involvement, order and organization, and rule clarity.

More conventional forms of student achievement are also linked to student perceptions of classroom climate and environment. Comprehension of science reading material was related significantly to independence; the ability to design experiments and conceptualize problems was linked to task orientation and innovation; and student ability to draw reasonable inferences and conclusions from data was connected with climate variables such as participation, differentiation, task orientation, order and organization, and innovation.

Because this is *correlational* research, we must not assume that certain classroom climate conditions *cause* specific learning outcomes. Clearly, there is a relationship between the social/psychological climate of the schoolroom and the quality of learning that takes place; however, we cannot be sure which set of variables is the causal set. Further, because this study was set in Australia, we cannot be certain of its generalizability to other cultures and school organizations.

This research is important, though, because it suggests the kind of climate that is related to significant achievement. All of the classroom climate variables are under the control of the educator. If the likelihood of significant learning can be increased by attention to these environmental variables, such attention should be given to them, especially in view of recent concern with scientific "illiteracy" expressed in the popular media and the journals of science professionals.

While it would be unreasonable to expect any variable or set of variables to be unfailingly linked with student achievement, it is proper to attend to the mix of conditions that seem to be related to increased student learning. If this study helps us understand the kind of classroom in which significant learning outcomes are achieved, it contributes much to our ability to design successful and effective school experiences for all youth.

This summary was prepared by J. Howard Johnston, assistant dean, Graduate Studies and Research in Education, University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Similar analyses of other responses to related problems could begin to provide descriptions of students' current levels of critical thinking and provide a basis for long-term assessment of growth in critical thinking.

Systematic analysis of writing samples and structured observation procedures are two useful means of supplementing data from objective tests. Both of these procedures provide information about students' strengths and weaknesses in critical thinking. These procedures also provide descriptive information about ways in which students approach critical thinking tasks, and thus suggest starting points for enrichment activities.

If middle level educators are to pursue the traditional goal of thinking enrichment, they must continue to develop and disseminate procedures for integrating critical thinking with all facets of the curriculum. While recent national assessments document the need for such integration, they also indicate that the next few years may be an especially opportune time for doing so.

Instructional efforts of the past decade have resulted in measurable progress in basic skill areas, especially among minority students and students in special support programs. National assessments also suggest that students entering middle level programs will be demonstrating stronger reading and thinking abilities. All of these considerations underscore a need to move beyond basics to a greater emphasis on critical and creative reasoning.

A vital dimension of any effort to move beyond basics must be the modification of testing procedures to include more open-ended assessments of reading, thinking, and writing. Greater emphasis on such assessment procedures will encourage teachers to devote more teaching time to critical thinking exercises and problem-solving discussions.

The continued development of systematic procedures for such assessment may also free teachers and students from some of the constraints imposed by dependency on strictly objective measures, and further promote efforts to meet the needs of transescent learners.

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Time on Task: Implications for Middle Level Instruction

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Many factors, such as student aptitude and prior learning, cannot be controlled by our schools. One factor that *is* under the direct control of the school, however, is time and how it is spent in the classroom.

Time on Task Research

Much of the research about instructional time and its relationship to student achievement focuses on three instructional time measures: allocated time, engaged time, and academic learning time.

Allocated Time refers to the amount of time provided for instruction in a given curricular area. Although allocated time determines the amount of time that will be *available* for instruction, it does not guarantee that time will be used for learning. Some allocated time is spent taking attendance, making lunch counts, giving announcements, and other routine housekeeping activities.

Therefore, increasing the amount of allocated time without increasing activities that facilitate learning is not likely to promote increased student achievement.

In many school systems, allocated time is a matter of policy and is controlled by the school board and/or superintendent. However, the school principal can control the scheduled breaks in the school day such as recess, lunch, and special programs, as well as the efficiency of the schedule. Teachers can determine how much of the class period or day they will spend on housekeeping chores and how much on instruction. Therefore, the amount of time available for teaching is easily influenced at the school level.

Engaged Time refers to the amount of time that students actually spend interacting, studying, and/or discussing a subject or learning objective within the allocated timeframe. It is, in other words, the proportion of allocated time spent "on task."

The research in this area *strongly* suggests that there is a positive relationship between the amount of time the student spends on a subject, and his or her achievement in that subject (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1981). There are, however, interesting differences in achievement outcomes for different kinds of on-task behavior (Lomax and Cooley, 1980). Students who spent a great deal of time discussing, answering questions, listening, and engaging in other types of classroom interactive activities, have higher achievement than students involved in non-interactive classroom activities such as seat work.

Academic Learning Time (ALT) takes "engaged time" one step further by stating that engaged time *must* be spent at an appropriate level of difficulty for student success (Stallings, 1980). A task that is too easy wastes time, and a task that is too difficult can frustrate and distract the student's attention from the task at hand and the several that follow. Consequently, student success with learning activities promotes "time on task."

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ALT also suggests the use of teaching methods that maximize student achievement. While ALT research does not recommend eliminating seat work, homework, or individual projects, it does emphasize the need to maximize *interactive* instructional activities—those which require discussing, questioning, and actively processing information and concepts.

Time on Task and the Teacher

While the *amount* of allocated time available is usually controlled by the school administration, board policy, or legislative action, the *quality* of instructional time is clearly related to teacher behavior, student behavior, and instructional strategies.

Research by Harnischfeger and Wiley (1978) reveals a model of teacher behavior that is related to time on task and active student involvement. The activities that influence time use are (AASA, 1982):

- Planning and preparation: the long-range planning before the year begins, focusing on broad objectives, goals, concepts, and topics
- Instructional strategies: the type of strategies and methods the teacher employs, with special attention to those that produce *active* student learning
- Teacher capabilities, including:
  - –Planning—the detailed day-to-day guidelines and activities developed for classroom use, such as daily lesson plans
  - –Implementing—the translation of these plans into actual classroom activities
  - –Inducing—motivating students to increase their active learning and task involvement
  - –Communicating—stating instructions and expectations clearly and giving corrective feedback in ways that do not discourage task involvement by the student.

Classroom conditions, though, rarely exactly duplicate the attributes of a model, so while the above plan is useful as an overall framework for developing teacher competencies, it is also important to examine the events that disrupt classroom learning time. If the teacher and administrator can anticipate these disruptions, they can take the necessary steps to prevent them or to minimize their effect on classroom time.

Coping with Disruptions

According to a recent American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) survey of teachers, discipline problems decrease the amount of classroom time spent on task more often than any other factor. A disruption in the classroom takes the teacher's attention away from instruction. Moreover, the disturbance focuses the attention of other students on the incident, distracting them from the learning task. Much instructional time is wasted as the teacher must redirect students to their initial level of learning.

We can distinguish between a "classroom management" problem and a "classroom discipline" problem. A classroom management problem is present when the student stops cooperating with the teacher. A classroom discipline problem is present when the student interferes with another student's opportunity to learn.

Disruptive student behavior can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. A student's behavior during a lecture may be viewed as disruptive, while that same behavior might be viewed as appropriate in a small group situation. Research, in fact, indicates that often teachers take themselves, and consequently the rest of the class, off task by overreacting to student misbehavior (Bossert, 1979). A classroom management problem may not be necessarily worth taking valuable instruction time to correct until after the class activity is completed. In other words, if the entire group is working well except for one student who is looking at a comic book, it is more disruptive for the teacher to correct that student verbally than it would be to continue the activity and reprimand the student when the activity is over.

> If we are going to maximize time on task in our middle level classrooms we must, above all, accommodate the developmental stages of our students.

The best advice is to always use the least disruptive method for controlling behavior. In the comic book example, the least disruptive thing for the teacher to do would be move near the student. If that isn't enough, taking the comic book away without comment would solve the problem. A verbal reprimand could wait until the end of class.

Most classroom disruptions occur during breaks in the conceptual activity of the class, such as between activities or when a new activity has no logical, intellectual relationship to the previous one. Students learn more efficiently if they are not required to reorient themselves to different tasks without any advance preparation.

Learning is enhanced when the teacher and the students move from activity to activity without interruption; in other words, when activities "overlap." The easiest way to assure that this transition between activities will be smooth is to let the students know, in advance, what the schedule of events will be within the presentation.

The method that is most effective for presenting the agenda for a class is the *overview*, a verbal description of the activities that will occur during the class. This short procedural outline or agenda establishes a clear connection between the objective for the session and the activities that will be conducted. In addition, it allows the participants to prepare themselves for subsequent activities.

The *overview* has three major sections:

- *A statement of the objective of the class.* ("Today's class will prepare you to use a map and airline schedule to plan a trip.")
- *An outline of the activities of the class.* ("We will practice using a time table, and review the route we want to take. Then, we will work in small groups to plan the shortest trip to reach our destination. After that, each group will present what the members think is the best route.")
- *A description of any special procedures to be followed.* ("When we begin to plan our trips, I will ask you to also list the names of local people who might assist you in getting information about the best routes to follow.")

Related to the overview is the *group alert*—the practice of informing students when changes in activity are about to take place. This provides the student with ample time to organize necessary materials and prepare, perceptually, for a change from one agenda item to another.

If we are going to maximize time on task in our middle level classrooms we must, above all, accommodate the developmental stages of our students. In other words, we should not ask the student to do things he or she cannot do.

The young adolescent's physical growth mandates activity. The pre-adolescent years of development (ages 10-14) represent the most dramatic period of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes during the student's school years. Tremendous changes in the bone and muscular structure, accompanied by hormonal and glandular changes, dictate physical activity, mood changes, a need for self-assertion and autonomy, conformity to peer pressure, and sex role redefinitions. A classroom setting that fails to accommodate these dynamic conditions will create so much anxiety for the youngsters that they are almost certain to be "off task" much of the time.

If the classroom structure and classroom activity does not provide opportunity for peer interaction, young adolescents are likely to make their own opportunities. The program, then, should satisfy these developmental needs; it should provide an opportunity for students to interact with one another in subject-oriented tasks such as projects, papers, and task groups of one kind or another. Similarly, if the class activity does not permit physical movement, the drive for it will not be eliminated, it simply will be manifested in other ways, such as fidgeting, grabbing, and, perhaps, even fighting.

Just how much uninterrupted learning time can the young adolescent endure? To a large degree, the attention span is a function of the task, but most pre-adolescents can sustain productive attention for up to 18 minutes, with a maximum concentration span of about 16 minutes (Toepfer, n.d.). Obviously, the classroom organization, the types of strategies used, and the student's involvement in the learning tasks are critical issues in maximizing learning activities for pre-adolescents.

This also suggests that activities should be varied during the class period, with careful attention given to maintaining the logical connection between activities. Teachers should also plan to sustain student attention and monitor and redirect their attention when it wanders. Several techniques are especially useful for controlling attention (Good and Brophy, 1980):

- Constantly scan the classroom. Students are less likely to engage in off-task behavior if they believe they will be discovered doing so
- Periodically require some type of response from each student— an answer to a question, a short assignment, or a comment on the topic
- Do not put anxious students on the spot by increasing fear of failure. Use a more indirect method, such as, "Ed, listen to Susan because I want to ask you about her response."
- Concentrate on involving everyone, not on catching the inattentive.
- Repeat your rationale for asking unpredictable questions. "I will call on everyone today because I want to see how well you understand this new subject."
- Make eye contact with students, move around the room, and engage individual students, by name, in what is going on. "John, what did you think of Steve's analysis?"
- Use the least dramatic response possible toward an inattentive student. Eye contact, body position, or

gesture should precede a verbal comment, and when a comment is made it should be short, authoritative, and spoken softly: "John, pay attention."

Active involvement is generally regarded as a sound instructional goal. Time on task research supports the assumption that active involvement in learning tasks enhances learning while passive, non-interactive strategies are, to a great degree, counterproductive. From a classroom management perspective, it is also better to involve students in our plans than to have them create their own agendas and, perhaps, create disruption and discipline problems.

Improving Teacher Time Use

Teachers and administrators should give systematic attention to the way time is used in the classroom. Teachers can improve time use by giving special attention to the following suggestions:

1. *Restrict lectures to approximately 15 minutes.* When teacher-directed activities are in process, the teacher should monitor student attention and involvement so students can be brought back on task when their attention wanders.

Middle level administrators should analyze their schedule to ensure periodic breaks from academics in the school day.

2. *Encourage student-to-student interaction.* Peer interaction during instruction can be an extremely important component in improving on-task behaviors. An additional advantage is the opportunity it gives the teacher to monitor, observe, and evaluate students and their learning. Effective teachers have known for some time that peer-to-peer discussion can provide more perceptive feedback than student-to-teacher interaction. Such interaction can be observed in role playing, independent task groups, simulation groups, discussion groups, and dramatization. The key to successful peer group activities is presence of a clear purpose and clear instructions to guide the group task.
3. *Use seat work activities with care.* Research studies have indicated that seat work accounts for approximately 60 to 75 percent of all instructional time in our classrooms (AASA, 1982). As mentioned earlier, seat work is not as effective an instructional tool as are interactive modes of instruction. Seat work, if not handled properly, can also take students off task when they:
   - Are not given clear instructions
   - Are all given the same assignment regardless of ability level, which means that the brighter students complete the work early and wait for something else to do
   - Have questions but are too insecure to ask or see that the teacher is busy with other students and is delayed in assisting them.

   Seat work is effective if the teacher moves around the classroom, monitors the activity, and is available to answer questions and provide assistance. Seat work should not be used as "filler time" or "practice time." It should be viewed as a learning activity and should be directed to the appropriate ability level.
4. *Competitive teams of students working on academic tasks can enhance student time on task* (Anderson, 1980). Healthy and controlled academic competition can be quite effective in involving even the most reluctant students in group learning tasks. Academic competition at this level, however, should be team-focused rather than individual and should be sensitive to the social/emotional needs of the pre-adolescent.
5. *Simulation and gaming techniques are extremely effective methods of involving pre-adolescent students in learning tasks.* Microcomputer software that focuses on simulation and gaming are excellent for small group activities. The microcomputer enables the student to receive immediate feedback, which is an essential ingredient in many simulation exercises. Educational games can be either teacher-made or commercially produced. Student involvement and learning engagement rates for both simulation and educational games are extremely high.
6. *The teachers' expectations of students can affect learning engagement rates* (Mid-Continent Research Educational Laboratories, 1981). Research shows that lower teacher expectations affect: the amount of feedback they give to students; the amount of time spent with students; and seating arrangements in the classroom.

Teachers should examine their expectations of their students. Questions that might be helpful in this self-assessment are:

- Are the brighter students assigned to a particular area of the classroom?
- Does the teacher call on the same students too frequently or respond more attentively to some students than others?

- During instruction, does the teacher move about or stay in one location of the room?
- Are rewards, such as verbal reinforcement or privileges, distributed fairly? (AASA, 1982)

7. *The middle level teacher should provide a clear, concise, and understandable structure for learning.* Regardless of the type or variety of learning activities planned for a lesson, a teacher must provide a clear, organized, and understandable structure for learning. Tikunoff, Berliner, and Rist (1975) found that effective teachers provided an overview of what was to be learned, delineated main topics, signaled the beginning and ending of lessons, and summarized at the conclusion of a lesson. Smooth transitions between activities were also established.
8. *Middle level teachers should use a variety of instructional strategies.* Research indicates that increased variety in instruction relates to improved student achievement and time on task (Johnston, 1980). Given the developmental characteristics of pre-adolescents, as well as their short attention spans, it is extremely important that teachers become adept at introducing variety in their teaching.

Administrator Roles in Improving Time Use

Factors that may affect "time on task" should be a primary consideration in assessing a school's procedures, schedule policies, rules, regulations, curriculum, and supervision practices. The school staff cannot ignore the powerful influence of time on the instructional program. In addition to helping teachers achieve the suggestions listed above, administrators should attempt to enhance time use as well. Some suggestions are:

1. *Eliminate unnecessary classroom interruptions.* Research shows that one of the most common classroom disruptions (Stallings, 1980) is the unscheduled use of the intercom during instructional activities. Also, school personnel frequently walk into a classroom to ask teachers questions, interrupting classroom activities. According to Stallings, both practices sent students hidden messages that "instructional time is not valuable."
2. *Consider using interdisciplinary teaching teams.* Interdisciplinary teams of teachers can be given latitude to plan instruction in a block/flexible schedule format. By giving these teams common planning time and a block of instructional time that they are responsible for allocating, scheduling will be more efficient and based on instructional needs. In addition, travel time between classes can be minimized by the close proximity of classrooms. Interdisciplinary teaching teams encourage interdisciplinary instruction, a sound practice at this age level, as well as a more efficient use of instructional time.
3. *Evaluate your "pull-out" programs.* Numerous "pull-out" programs that require students to leave the regular classroom for a period of time can have negative effects on time on task. While these programs are, in many instances, mandated by law, loss of learning time can be minimized and controlled through improved coordination and communication between the administrator, special teachers, and classroom teachers, so that students are pulled out of the regular class during "least inconvenient" instructional times. Combining pull-out programs may also be helpful—a student makes only one exit and "re-entry" rather than several.
4. *Evaluate your school attendance.* Student absenteeism can play an important role in diminishing the total time students are on task and learning. The more a student is absent from school, the more difficult it becomes to catch up, and the more left out the student feels.

   While the problem of absenteeism appears to be one over which the school has little control, many special efforts developed to combat this problem have been quite successful. One school allowed classes to compete against each other for attendance records (AASA, 1982). At the end of each month, the winning class went on a field trip. Attendance improved dramatically as students urged their peers to attend school. Teachers reinforced this behavior because of their own desire to win. This type of competitive program capitalizes on the pre-adolescent's strong need for peer acceptance.

   Another approach to battling absenteeism is parental contact. These contacts can be made by school volunteers, administrators, and/or teachers. Many middle level schools have found that a teacher advisory program can provide a needed link with the parents and the student.

   Whatever approach is used to combat excessive absenteeism, it is likely to be extremely time-consuming and require a tremendous effort to be successful. Consequently, these programs require strong commitment and support from the *entire* faculty if they are to succeed.

   The principal should also try to reduce teacher absenteeism. Teacher attendance is moderately correlated with student achievement, so it is worth the effort to build an incentive system for teacher attendance as well. Special luncheons or breakfasts for the teachers who had perfect attendance for a given month is a technique used by one school with

some success.

5. *Review your school schedule in light of time on task research and the developmental needs of your students.* While recess breaks can be a great outlet for pre-adolescent needs, such as physical activity and social interaction, they must be appropriately scheduled. For example, if recess is scheduled too close to the lunch break, there may not be sufficient time for instruction when the students return from recess. If too much time is allocated for recess, it replaces needed instructional time.

   The time between classes and the duration of the lunch period should also be evaluated carefully. If sufficient time has not been scheduled for restroom breaks, the extra time will overlap into instructional time.

   Conrad Toepfer reports that pre-adolescent attention spans and learning achievement rates drop when middle level students are scheduled into three or more consecutive academic classes. Middle level administrators should analyze their schedule to ensure periodic breaks from academics in the school day. These could include advisor/advisee periods, exploratory/activity programs, recess, physical education, music, industrial arts, and home economics classes.

6. *A school discipline policy should be developed jointly by staff and principal.* Jane Stallings of the Stallings Teaching and Learning Institute has found that simple misbehavior escalates into serious discipline problems for two primary reasons: lack of classroom management skills on the part of the teacher, and lack of support on the part of the principal. She says that where teachers and principals have jointly developed a clearly stated, adhered to discipline policy, student discipline problems decrease.

   As important as having a simple schoolwide discipline code in which the entire staff has ownership, is the communication of that code to students and parents. This should be done early in the school year and periodically reinforced. Many middle level schools have found that the adviser/advisee session class is a natural time for this to occur. By significantly decreasing discipline problems in the school, valuable time for instruction is salvaged and opportunities for academic achievement are greatly enhanced.

Conclusion

The middle level school is an institution dedicated to the maximum intellectual, social, physical, and emotional development of students. Our educational program and our instruction for this age level must respect the development needs of our pre-adolescent students.

As we review research related to student achievement and instructional time, our education systems, schools, and teachers should evaluate their instructional program(s) in light of our knowledge of the pre-adolescent student and the research related to "time on task."

The key to improving student achievement in our middle level schools is to maximize active student involvement in learning tasks. We can do this by capitalizing on the growth characteristics of pre-adolescent students that make these learners so unique.

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MARCH 1988

Algebra Isn't the Answer

Alternatives To Enrich Eighth Grade Mathematics

By Fernand J. Prevost

Fewer than half of all New Hampshire students who take algebra as eighth graders continue to study mathematics through high school. Those students who do not continue to study mathematics beyond the sophomore year usually drop out because their achievement in mathematics is far below their achievement in other courses—despite the fact that they were among the highest achieving students in grades 6 and 7.

Is algebra, then, the best choice for enriching the mathematics experience of these bright eighth grade students? Enriched courses may be preferable to accelerated courses for most able students.

This nagging question about "acceleration" grew out of an exhaustive study of mathematics, science, and computer education in New Hampshire schools that included any of the grades 7-12 (Ewert and Prevost, 1984).

Support from Other Studies

Many studies support this view. For instance, Chambers (1987) studied accelerated eighth graders in Wisconsin schools and was able to determine how many students take algebra in grade 8 and how many from that same class are enrolled in pre-calculus in grade 11. The data for the graduating classes of 1980, 1983, and 1986 are reported in Table 1.

Chambers writes: "The good news is that the retention rate has increased from 25 percent to 41 percent over the last six years. The bad news is that only 4 out of 10 students identified as our best and brightest in the seventh grade are still among our best and brightest four years later."

A review of both the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) (McKnight et al., 1985) and the Third National Mathematics Assessment (NAEP, 1983), showed generally low level performance of 13-year-olds on even simple computational tasks. The fact that only 31.5 percent of the eighth graders in the NAEP sample could determine what 60 percent of 50 is led me to question efforts at acceleration. The fact that the 13-year-olds in the SIMS, some of whom were studying algebra in the eighth grade, were essentially in the middle of the international distribution in arithmetic, algebra, and descriptive statistics; were near the 25th percentile in geometry; and were substantially below the 25th percentile in measurement, indicate that our students might benefit from enriched mathematics experience rather than acceleration into algebra.

The results from the Fourth Mathematics Assessment of the NAEP show that although most students have reasonable proficiency in computational skills, the majority do not understand many basic concepts and are unable to apply those skills they have learned to even the simplest problem-solving situations (Carpenter et al., 1987).

In October 1986, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) issued a position statement on "Provisions for the Mathematically Talented and Gifted Students" (see Note 1). After careful study, the Council

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Table 1

Graduation Class	8th Grade Algebra Enrollment	11th Grade Precalculus Enrollment	Percent Retained
1980	2605	703	27
1983	3577	912	25
1986	4371	1810	41

concluded that:

> The needs of mathematically talented and gifted students cannot be met by programs of study that only accelerate these students through the standard school curriculum, nor can they be met by programs that allow students to terminate their study of mathematics before graduation from high school.

The statement suggests that these students need enriched and expanded curricula, with programs that emphasize higher order thinking skills, nontraditional topics, and the applications of mathematics. The statement concludes by stating that acceleration is "recommended only for those students whose interests, attitudes, and participation clearly reflect the ability to persevere and excel throughout the entire" school program. Furthermore, when the Council's *Curriculum and Evaluation STANDARDS for School Mathematics* were released in October 1987, the writers of the *STANDARDS* took a similar stand. They wrote:

> . . . for all but a very few talented students, we believe that expanding and enriching the common curriculum outlined in the standards is better than acceleration. Furthermore, the gifted need to associate cooperatively with their peers (NCTM, 1987, p. 17).

On the Other Hand

In the September 1987 issue of *Mathematics Teacher*, Zalman Usiskin argues that elementary algebra "can, should, and must be" the eighth grade course for the average student. In particular, Usiskin decries those who advocate a reconsideration of this practice and takes issue with NCTM for their stand that seventh and eighth grade courses ought to be enriched rather than accelerated.

Usiskin contends that students find little new in the present junior high curriculum; that eighth grade algebra can be successful; that what is called enrichment is not a suitable alternative; that it is probably easier to learn algebra at age 13 than at age 14; and that offering algebra in eighth grade reduces academic pressure on students in grades 9-12.

Usiskin's proposed algebra course is a variant of the usual grade 9 course. Usiskin would have us replace the "contrived word problems" with applications; delete the more difficult factoring and all work with rational expressions; and solve quadratic equations only by use of the formula. This modified algebra course is to be preceded by the study of *Transition Mathematics* (Usiskin et al., 1986), a course designed at the University of Chicago to bridge the gap between the study of *arithmetic* in grade school and the study of *mathematics* in the upper grades.

What the University of Chicago curriculum developers propose is quite different from the programs and practices criticized by those opposed to acceleration.

The present practice is to offer the "standard" algebra course, the one taught at the receiving high school. As a rule, eighth grade algebra is not preceded by a specially designed course at grade 7 and the program makes no allowance for modifying the algebra course. However, the receiving high school expects that the students will have covered the same material, and at the same pace.

The University of Chicago program, then, offers yet another *alternative* to schools. But it is by no means the only road to follow and many educators do not agree that "can, should, and must" are necessarily the correct descriptors for this *single* alternative.

Need for Revision

The seventh and eighth grade curriculum should be reviewed and revitalized. NCTM's *Curriculum and Evaluation STANDARDS for School Mathematics* (1987) states: "The need for change discussed in the introduction to these standards is nowhere more acute than in grades 5 8" (p. 50).

The members of the working group who prepared the grades 5-8 Standards for the Council and Driscoll (1988)

cite the research that gives "dramatic proof of the pervasiveness of repetition in the math curriculum."

Driscoll also points out that this repetition ceases abruptly when the student moves to algebra. There, almost 90 percent of the material is new to students. Driscoll writes: "In the chain of the math curriculum, the shift from arithmetic to algebra is one of the weakest links."

Is the content challenging enough to teach the bright youngsters we now seek to serve with algebra? Can we provide a program that dramatically reduces the repetitiveness of the present curriculum? Is there research to guide the choices we make and are there model curricula to consult? The answer is an unequivocal Yes!

Driscoll cites the work of Romberg and Burton to support the case for introducing more doing of mathematics in the seventh grade and eighth grade program. These opportunities for doing should reflect those "activities common to all of mathematics: abstracting, inventing, proving, and applying." Driscoll quotes Romberg as suggesting (Driscoll, 1988).

Help for Curriculum Planners

NCTM's *STANDARDS* suggest that more time and effort must be given to the areas of problem solving (not the word problems at the end of the chapter), mathematics as communication, and mathematical reasoning. As the standards are reviewed and refined, many examples of activities that encourage the doing of mathematics in the context of problem solving, communication, and reasoning will surely be shared with the mathematics community.

The content strands proposed by the writers of the *STANDARDS* are:

- Number
- Number systems
- Computation and estimation
- Measurement
- Geometry
- Statistics
- Probability
- Algebra.

They encourage work that leads students to see the connections among mathematical ideas; that involves students in exploring measurement and geometry; that permits students to collect, organize, and interpret data from real-world situations, and to make predictions based on experimental results.

The latter two, statistics and probability, can be introduced now by using the materials from the Quantitative Literacy Project (1987). The QLP is a joint project of NCTM and the American Statistical Association. The writers produced four modules that are available from Dale Seymour Publications.

The writers of the *STANDARDS* include algebra as one strand in the richness of experiences that students ought to have. They view the role of the study of algebra as the bridge between the concrete elementary curriculum and the more abstract mathematics program of the high school. Thus, they encourage the *informal* investigation of algebraic concepts so students might gain confidence in their ability to abstract relationships and use a variety of forms to describe that relationship.

The writers then suggest a variety of explorations, activities that complement Romberg's notion of abstracting, inventing, proving, and applying mathematics.

Even this brief outline of possible alternatives (see Note 2) counters most of Usiskin's contentions. There is much to do that *is new;* materials exist to make enrichment a viable alternative. The program described above would reduce the pressure on students in grades 9-12 (see Note 3). As for the age at which algebra is most easily learned, the jury is surely still out.

Conclusions

Programs designed to serve mathematically precocious students (the top 3-5 percent) frequently end up serving as many as 25 to 33 percent of the eighth graders. Many of these youngsters are frustrated by the new expectations. The programs in grade 6 and 7 made little or no provision for the change and students are shocked by the mediocre grades earned in a subject in which they earlier excelled.

Talk to some students who dropped out of mathematics and get a sense of what caused them to do so. Unless your data are atypical of the New Hampshire and Wisconsin data, consider not teaching algebra, but designing a challenging alternative for the bright students in the school, one that is structured around some of the topics noted in the *STANDARDS* and one concerned with the doing of mathematics.

For those for whom it is appropriate, a course in algebra can be rewarding and fun. For many other able youngsters, it is not. Viable alternatives are available for them.

Notes

1. A copy of the Council's statement is available upon request. Send a stamped, self-addressed legal-sized enve-

lope to: NCTM, Dept. E, 1906 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091.

2. Two other programs are recommended for review: the Middle Grades Mathematics Project, and the Used Numbers Project. Contact Prof. William Fitzgerald, Mathematics Dept., Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. 48824 about the former and Susan Friel or Susan Jo Russell, Technical Education Research Centers, 1696 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138 about Used Numbers.

3. As this is written, the revised New York State Syllabus for 8th Grade Mathematics has just been released. The suggested curriculum is rich and vital and does not propose the study of algebra I for eighth graders. Readers are invited to review both the 7th grade (released last year) and 8th grade New York syllabi.

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Part 3

Creating Responsive Middle Level Schools:

School Restructuring and Leadership

Creating Responsive Middle Level Schools:

A

School Restructuring

School restructuring was the "educational term" of the '80s, but for middle level educators, restructuring dates back to the turn of the century, the very beginning of middle schools.

The early pioneers called for different schools—schools with different grade level structures, schools with different organization, and schools with different curricular and instructional emphases. Over the years, other middle level educators have echoed the call of the pioneers, and "school restructuring" has remained a central theme in developing schools that are responsive to the needs of early adolescents.

William Gruhn recounts his experiences as a middle level educator: experiences that span more than 60 years as a teacher, principal, professor, and author. He discusses the significant accomplishments of middle level education, successes and failures, preparation of teachers, and major challenges and priorities for the future.

Gruhn takes the greatest satisfaction from the fact that from the very beginning of the junior high/middle school movement, educators have generally agreed that the major objective of this institution should be to provide a program to meet the unique needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents. Without doubt, this is the mission of serious middle level educators, a mission that continues to emphasize school restructuring.

Developing Responsive Schools

Looking back over a decade is sometimes discouraging. Such is the case when one reads *Middle Level Educational Programs: Making the Ideal a Reality*, written in 1981. Donald Clark and Jerry Valentine draw from the research of the 1970s to describe the status of middle education and to explore what the ideal might be.

Middle level schools are still a long way from reaching the ideal they describe. In this article, programs of successful middle level schools are categorized into the areas of program environment, program content, and program strategies with listings of successful practices given for each of the areas.

Using some of the preliminary findings of the NASSP-Dodge Foundation National Study of Schools in the Middle, Clark and Valentine describe ways in which responsive middle level schools can be developed. They offer guidelines for planning, staff development, implementation, and evaluation—guidelines that are just as viable today as they were 10 years ago.

The article concludes with a questionnaire designed to help principals evaluate current pro-

grams and the appropriateness of change, and to help them begin a systematic approach to school restructuring.

Ted Baranis, in *Reorganizing Middle Level Education: What To Consider and How To Proceed*, describes how one school district reorganized its middle level schools. He believes that some of the factors influencing middle level schools in their efforts to implement more responsive programs are the desire to slow down social sophistication, to provide for better transition between elementary and middle level schools, to improve student guidance programs, and to create more positive school climate.

In changing the emphasis of middle level schools toward more developmental responsiveness, Beranis believes a comprehensive plan is a critical component. The comprehensive plan, which facilitates the transition from the junior high to middle school, "must present not only the philosophy and goals associated with the move, but it must also serve as a blueprint for each phase of the transition."

Beranis suggests that an effective transition plan include the following two goals:

1. Provision for a comprehensive and readable plan that communicates the overriding educational benefits of the proposed change to parents and community.
2. Provision for a reasonable detailed outline of the basic organizational patterns and program changes that must take place if the primary educational goals of the new middle school are to be achieved.

Throughout the remaining sections of the article, he describes the various components of the reorganizational process, including an outline of the transition plan, transition initiatives and decisions, key concerns in transitional planning, transitional issues, and transition dividends.

Middle Level Staff Development

Any successful restructuring or reorganizing effort must address the important issue of staff development. In *Staff Development Programs for Middle Level Schools*, Donald Clark and Sally Clark describe the rationale for staff development at the middle level.

Lack of teachers specifically educated to deal with the unique needs of early adolescents gives increased importance to comprehensive staff development programs. Clark and Clark believe that staff development programs should be organized at the school level and that administrators and teachers should have major input into the decision making process.

New programs that incorporate interdisciplinary teaming, teacher advisories, and participatory teaching strategies are often part of middle level school restructuring plans. Each of these programs requires different skills from teachers.

Clark and Clark write that the identification of new programs skills and knowledge and necessary resources, when combined with an assessment of existing teacher skills, knowledge, and available resources, provide a clear picture of in-service needs.

Staff development programs must be closely aligned with the school restructuring process. Just as the restructuring process must be gradual and continual, so must staff development. Clark and Clark warn that "if middle level schools are to establish programs that are appropriately responsive to the needs of early adolescents, an ongoing staff development program is a necessary ingredient of the total effort of those schools."

Schools that wish to remain viable must continue to revise, reinvent, and renew. As needs are continually assessed and as new curricular programs are developed and implemented, new staff development programs must be established.

"Middle level schools," Clark and Clark conclude, "because of the changing nature of their clientele, must be on an ever moving cycle of self-renewal."

Using Turning Points

Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, a report of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, provides an important challenge to middle educators to develop more responsive schools for early adolescents. Sally Clark and Donald Clark, in *Restructuring Middle Schools: Strategies for Using Turning Points*, describe the importance of *Turning Points* to mid-

dle level educators. They show how the report confirms that many of the programs middle level educators have been trying to implement are developmentally appropriate.

The Carnegie report also introduces several new elements to the middle level philosophy: it points out weaknesses, establishes goals for middle level schools, and makes recommendations for school restructuring.

Clark and Clark believe that *Turning Points* provides an excellent model for school assessment and restructuring. They contend that the overarching question that teachers and administrators of every school should ask is: "How well does our school compare with the recommendations of *Turning Points?*"

Focusing on the eight recommendations of *Turning Points*, the authors discuss the importance of each recommendation, the research and literature that support the recommendations, and questions that middle level administrators can use as guidelines to compare their school program with recommendations of the Carnegie Task Force.

While Clark and Clark believe *Turning Points* provides a wealth of information and specific guidance toward the restructuring of middle level schools, they are equally sure that the key to the successful implementation of the eight recommendations lies with principals and their ability and skill to provide visionary leadership.

JUNE 1983

Interview with William T. Gruhn

The influence of William T. Gruhn on middle level education would be impossible to measure or to overestimate.

As speaker, consultant, adviser, and workshop director, he has touched the lives of thousands of those in junior high and middle school leadership positions.

William T. Gruhn

As an author, with Harl Douglass of three editions of The Modern Junior High School, *he has communicated basic information and reference material to thousands more.*

His contributions to middle level education have spanned nearly six decades, from teacher, principal, and professor, to his present position as emeritus professor of education at the University of Connecticut.

In 1982, at the San Francisco Convention, the NASSP Committee on Middle Level Education recognized Gruhn as "Mr. Junior High School" in recognition of his significant service.

With the humility that is typical of the man, he agreed to this interview "if you feel I can make a contribution." We believe that whenever William T. Gruhn speaks on middle level education he makes a contribution.

The contribution that follows is unique—the synthesis of nearly 60 years of leadership in a cause we share.

—George E. Melton

Q: What do you see as the most significant accomplishments of the junior high/middle school movement?

A: In the late 1800s, two school systems developed in this country largely independent of each other—an elementary school system, which included grades seven, eight, or nine; and a high school system, usually with four grades. Many states had separate high school districts. Both systems concentrated on the mastery of subject matter, but showed little concern for the nature, needs, and interests of pupils at the various grade levels.

It was from this background that, after 1900, the junior high/middle school movement emerged. Educators began to see the need for an intermediate unit that would provide a transition from the elementary to the high school grades, offer a broader curriculum and program of activities appropriate for early adolescents, and give guidance and counseling services to assist early adolescents as they developed from childhood to later adolescence. Directing the attention of educators to these needs in our total elementary and secondary education system is, I believe, the most significant contribution of the junior high/middle school movement.

Q: Do you feel that educators responded to the unique needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents?

A: In assessing the initial response of educators to the junior high/middle school movement, one should remember that they were limited by existing buildings and facilities and by teachers, parents, and administrators who knew little about the unique needs and interests of early adolescents. With these limitations in mind, I think educators responded very well to the development of appropriate programs.

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One evidence of this response was the early introduction of new studies, such as industrial arts, home economics, music, and art in grades seven and eight. In some communities, when enrollment did not justify a separate middle level school, the broader programs were introduced in grades seven and eight in six-year high schools. Then, too, during the years from 1910 to 1930, many professors at our leading schools of education wrote books and offered courses on what then was most frequently called the "junior high school."

During this period, educators at the local level responded quite readily to the leadership of university teachers. In addition to the introduction of new studies, educators developed activities and guidance service programs that were suited to the needs and interests of early adolescents. And, with the many developments that have evolved through the years, middle level educators have continued to work for programs that are suited to the unique interests, needs, and abilities of early adolescents.

Q : What school practices best illustrate our successes?

A : Most significant in the junior high/middle school movement was the development, early in the movement, of a philosophy for the total program that centered on the unique needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents. This was accomplished largely through the leadership of professors of education at a number of our leading universities. No other unit in our public school system was developed from its beginning with such a clear statement of philosophy and objectives as the middle level school. This fact must be recognized as one of the unique successes of these schools.

Q : What school practices illustrate our failures?

A : I am reluctant to refer to the shortcomings in middle level education as "failures." Rather, I think we have problems, some of which have been with us since the beginning of the junior/middle school movement.

First, in many communities there continues to be a lack of adequate articulation between the middle level school and the high school. Although the middle level school may offer an effective transitional program, there usually is little contact between the faculty members of the respective schools. Such inter-faculty participation is essential if we are to have satisfactory articulation between the middle school and the other school units.

Second, some middle level schools have imitated the high school too closely in such activities as interschool athletics and social activities, as well as in some aspects of administrative organization. As a result, the middle level school sometimes falls short of its objective to adequately meet the needs of early adolescents.

Third, only a few institutions have developed programs specifically designed to prepare teachers for middle level schools. Consequently, many teachers, although well-prepared in their subjects, have little or no understanding of the philosophy of the middle level school, the nature and needs of early adolescents, and the most appropriate methods of teaching this age group.

Q : How might we "fix our failures"?

A : Some of these shortcomings can be relieved. For instance, some school systems have workshops or seminars in which teachers from various school levels come together to study problems of articulation. Curriculum development in some systems involves teachers of all levels working together to develop a well articulated total school program. Second, activities in the middle school should be examined to be sure that the time they require of students and the pressures they place on the participants are not too demanding for early adolescents. Finally, the middle level schools may need to encourage teachers to participate in graduate level inservice courses. Such programs may also be developed by the school system to help teachers understand the philosophy of middle level education and the nature and needs of early adolescents.

These are only a few examples of practices that school systems could use to improve some of the shortcomings in our middle level programs.

Q : Who should teach in the middle grades, and how should they be prepared?

A : As previously stated, those who teach in the middle grades should, in addition to being well qualified in the subjects they teach, understand the basic philosophy of middle level education and the psychology and nature of early adolescents. This preparation should be gained at the teacher education institution from which the teacher comes, and it needs to be continued at the inservice level. The preservice teacher education program also should include considerable experience with early adolescents.

Q : You always were objective in considering the reasons for and against a separate school unit and program at the middle level. What are the most compelling reasons for this today?

A : If the middle level grades are included with either the elementary or the high school unit, the program for early adolescents is frequently neglected. That is especially true in the combined junior-senior high schools. Teachers frequently prefer to teach in the upper grades, and parents and community members are more likely to be interested in the activities of the high school grades. If the middle grades are placed in a separate school unit it is usually easier to implement a philosophy and program that is directly concerned

with the needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents.

Q: Your statement of functions* of middle level education are as important for the development of responsive school programs today as when you first defined them in 1940. What are your thoughts on them today?

A: The functions for middle level education, which we first formulated in 1940, were based on the philosophy of education for early adolescents expressed in various nationally recognized committee reports and in the writings of professors of education at leading universities. We formulated a tentative statement of functions from these reports and writings which we then submitted for criticism and review to 12 professors of education and staff members of state departments of education who were recognized leaders in the junior high/middle school movement. The final statement of functions as we formulated it in 1940, therefore, represented the thinking of many educators who had previously expressed themselves on this subject.

Others who have written about junior high/middle school education in the years since 1940 have also proposed functions for the implementation of the philosophy and program of this school unit. In general, these statements have one thing in common; they are concerned with developing an educational program that is suited to the unique needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents.

I believe that one of the truly significant aspects of the junior high/middle school movement is the direction these statements of functions have given educators in developing programs for this school unit. In this respect the growth of the junior high/middle school level has been unique as compared with other units in our public school system. The statements of functions—whether ours or those defined by others—continue to serve as an essential part of the philosophy of junior high/middle school education.

Q: Would you specify additional functions today?

A: I reviewed the functions in 1970 and modified or expanded several of them to include changes in the educational program and in our understanding of early adolescents. I did not then, nor can I now, think of any specific function that should be added. I do believe, however, that any statement of basic philosophy should be reviewed from time to time to ensure harmony with changes in our society, the educational process, and our understanding of the particular age group that we are to serve. I would encourage other educators to express themselves on this subject so that the philosophy of middle level education may continue to reflect the needs of early adolescents in a rapidly changing society.

Q: What are the biggest challenges facing middle level education in the future?

A: There are several challenges that face middle level education in the immediate future. First, the financial problems in many school districts may limit the ability of schools to meet the needs of early adolescents. Frequently, the first budget cuts reduce or eliminate special service personnel such as reading specialists, counselors, and teachers for pupils with special needs. It may be difficult for middle level schools to offer the broad programs and facilities that have characterized them in the past.

A second challenge to middle level schools is declining pupil enrollment which frequently leads to the closing of some schools and the reorganization of others to include different grade levels. The problems confronted in grade reorganization may divert the attention of the administration and faculty from developing a program that meets the needs of early adolescents. This challenge need not be negative, however. It may serve as the opportunity to develop a more effective program in the middle level grades.

A third challenge to middle level educators is the criticism of schools by parents and other citizens. This criticism tends to center around the teaching of basic skills and knowledge. Educators must avoid the tendency to overreact to this criticism and to neglect other important aspects of the educational program. At the middle level, the challenge to educators is to improve the program to meet current criticisms concerning the teaching of the basic skills and also to try to satisfy more fully the social, personal, psychological, and physical needs of early adolescents.

Q: What would you see as the major priority items that middle level education needs to address in this decade?

A: One item that should have high priority in the middle level schools in the decade ahead is the preparation, at both the preservice and inservice levels, of administrators, counselors, and teachers. This need has, of course, been with us since the beginning of the junior high/middle school movement. However, with the problems that confront these schools in the decade ahead, this need will surely become more urgent. This problem is especially acute because of declining enrollments in the colleges and financial difficulties the colleges are experiencing in maintaining present programs and developing new ones.

Another priority item is the need to prepare early adolescents to live in today's complex society. Al-

*Integration, Exploration, Guidance, Differentiation, Socialization, and Articulation.

though problems with drugs, petty crime, sexual activity, vandalism, and alcohol are generally associated with the older adolescent age group, there is evidence that increasing numbers of early adolescents are experiencing such problems.

Another item that should be of concern to middle level educators is the effect of the new technology on the objectives and practices of their schools. Educators need to examine how computer technology should be used in the educational process and what responsibility, if any, middle level educators have for teaching early adolescents to use this equipment.

In the years immediately ahead, there will be great pressure on schools at all levels to use computer technology. It is a challenge to all educators to meet these pressures.

Q : As you reflect on the past, what are the accomplishments regarding middle level education from which you take the greatest joy and which give you hope for the future?

A : From the beginning of the junior high/middle school movement there has been general agreement among educators that the major objective of this institution should be to provide a program to meet the unique needs, interests, and abilities of early adolescents. Dedication to the achievement of this objective should give us much satisfaction. Although we should strive for further progress in middle level education, the successes that have been achieved are largely due to the fact that educators have had definite and well-defined objectives throughout the history of the junior high/middle school movement.

From the beginning, middle level schools have been characterized by a willingness on the part of administrators and other staff members to introduce innovative practices to the educational program. In fact, innovation has been one of the unique characteristics of this school unit. Some innovations were continued for a time and then were replaced by others. But the fact that innovation was encouraged in the middle level schools resulted in programs that were more dynamic and flexible in meeting the needs of early adolescents. At no other level in our school system has there been such interest in experimenting with innovative educational practices.

The most prominent satisfaction that may be derived from the junior high/middle school movement may well come from the dedicated leadership provided by educators at all levels. From the beginning of the movement, university professors have written books and articles in professional journals on junior high/middle school education; they have taught courses in this area; they have conducted workshops and seminars for educators in these schools; and they have lectured at conferences for junior high/middle school educators.

Department of education staff members in many states have also been active leaders in this movement. And the educators in the junior high and middle schools have been enthusiastic, dedicated leaders at the local level.

This leadership has affected past achievements, and it is essential to the further development of programs for early adolescents.

It has been of much satisfaction to me to serve on numerous occasions with the dedicated educators in the junior high/middle school movement.

JUNE 1981

Middle Level Educational Programs: Making the Ideal a Reality

Donald C. Clark

Jerry W. Valentine

Educational programs that provide for the special interests of the middle-level student have generated renewed interest in the last 20 years. Curriculum specialists, teachers, and administrators are revising programs to meet the social, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of the middle-level student; i.e., the students of grades 5 through 9.

In spite of this renewed interest in middle-level curriculum development, however, many educators are concerned that programs frequently reflect little more than a name change (junior high to middle school) and a reshuffling of grade-level organizations. As a consequence, many early adolescents are being exposed to "junior editions" of high school regardless of the nomenclature used or the grade-level pattern of the school.

The Middle Level Educational Program: What Should It Be?

A recurrent theme appears in the literature on middle-level curriculum organization. Grooms (1976, p. 31) states that middle-level school programs should feature a "non-grade structure where students may progress on a continuous learning basis without recognized grade levels or grade classification." Gatewood (1973, p. 221) indicates that one of the major goals of middle-level schools should be the development of "an instructional system focused on individual progress, with many curricular options and with individualized instructions in appropriate areas."

Other educators, while emphasizing that the focus of the curriculum must be on the learner rather than the structure, advocate programs that feature flexibility of time and group size, individualized/personalized instruction, a variety of learning experiences, alternative evaluation procedures, and new roles for educators. (Grooms, 1967; Kindred, et al. 1976; Eichhorn, 1973; Sale, 1979; and Clark and Clark, 1981).

In summarizing the ideal characteristics of a middle-level school, Educational Research Services (1975) listed the following items:

- –Emphasis on guidance and human relations
- –De-emphasis on sophisticated social activities
- –Individualized instruction
- –Exploratory courses and activities
- –Interdisciplinary teaching teams
- –Home-based teachers
- –Diversity in teacher certification
- –Flexible scheduling
- –Gradual transition from elementary to secondary education.

The middle level educational program can be

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divided into three major areas: environmental (organizational structure); content (scope and sequence); and strategies (processes, methods, and materials of instruction) (Valentine, 1981). These areas include the following items:

- Program Environment
  - A. Schedule that includes provision for both interdisciplinary blocks and single-subject courses.
  - B. Co-curricular activities scheduled as part of the regular school day.
  - C. Opportunity for all students to participate in intramural and, when appropriate, interscholastic programs.
  - D. Provision for community involvement in the educational program. This includes bringing community members into the school and involving students in the community.
  - E. Opportunities to learn through interdisciplinary teams where students can interact with a variety of teachers in a wide range of subject areas.
- Program Content
  - A. Emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills (language arts, mathematics, social science, and science).
  - B. Availability of required exploratory courses (music, art, home economics, and industrial arts, etc.).
  - C. Opportunity to participate in elective classes.
  - D. Provision for both remediation and enrichment.
  - E. Required reading instruction.
  - F. Provision for daily physical education instruction.
  - G. Opportunity for instruction in both health and sex education.
- Program Strategies
  - A. Availability of multi-media (print and nonprint) resources.
  - B. Provision for a variety of teacher-student learning and teaching styles.
  - C. Provision for flexible learning group size.
  - D. Adaptation of the curriculum to the concrete/formal cognitive learning needs of students.
  - E. Availability of a teacher-adviser program.
  - F. Provision for individualized grade reporting based on each student's ability and including parent conferences.
  - G. Opportunities for each student to explore and clarify values (self, community, and national).
  - H. Provision for individualized/personalized programs that include diagnosis (skills and learning style), prescription, and evaluation.
  - I. Organization of content into a continuous progress sequence that allows students to progress at their individual rates (Valentine, 1981).

These three major program areas, while not all-inclusive, focus on factors that must be addressed by principals and teachers as they review and consider the need for change of current middle-level school curricula.

Current Middle Level Educational Programs: Some Findings from the National Study of Schools in the Middle

Preliminary analysis of data from the NASSP-Dodge Foundation National Study of Schools in the Middle indicates a dissonance between the real world and the suggested model. Most middle-level schools appear to be traditional in nature. Standard class size of 15 to 35 students and single-subject classes are found in almost all of the schools. Ability grouping is widely used instead of more individualized programs. Elective classes are offered in great abundance, but there appear to be very few forced electives or exploratory courses.

If educators believe . . . that the early adolescent has needs, characteristics, and developmental tasks different from elementary and high school students, it is time that considerable effort be made to meet those needs.

The middle-level programs as described by administrators are more structured than flexible, more designed for the needs of the institution than for the needs of the students, and more like a high school than the program described in the previous section. If educators believe, as many do, that the early adolescent has needs, characteristics, and developmental tasks different from elementary and high school students, it is time that considerable effort be made to meet those needs. Most middle/junior high schools, with their rigid schedules and compartmentalized curricula, are unsuitable for meeting the needs of today's early adolescent.

Building a Responsive Educational Program

Successful educational program change is built around strong administrative leadership and faculty involvement. The plan, which must be comprehensive and systematic, must also be viewed by those involved as a realistic way to solve problems and meet goals. The following guidelines suggest ways for developing a comprehensive plan for change.

A. Planning

Howell (1981 p. 335) believes that administrators and teachers need to ask some basic questions before roles can be clarified and program changes can be made:

1. Why are we doing what we are doing?
2. Do we agree on the rationale for the existence of this school?
3. What is the desired profile of our ultimate product?

He continues:

> More questions need to be asked to define the "name of the game" for participants. First, what needs must we fulfill as functioning adults? This question provides an opportunity for faculty members to relate to a proposed end product, the young adult in society. Second, what do we want children to accomplish in school that will enhance their future as functioning adults? What knowledge do we hope to impart? What behavioral changes do we seek as experts in the profession? Third, what is the order of events, and what taxonomy can we develop and implement in terms of our curriculum that will support human needs and improve the profile of our ultimate product? (P. 336.)

Having once answered these questions, middle-level educators should have a clearer picture of school functions and purposes. With this foundation, teachers and administrators can begin to build a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and consistent with pre-established goals. To do this educators should be cognizant of seven curriculum components that can be managed to create the desired program. These components include flexibility of time and group size (scheduling); scope and sequence of the curriculum (content); clubs, student council, intramurals, and sports (activities); administrator and teacher roles (personnel); instructional processes (methods/strategies); print and nonprint materials (resources); and diagnosis/assessment of student learning styles, skills, knowledge, and attitudes (evaluation).

Any educational program, whether traditional or individualized, is built around these interacting components. The extent to which a school is able to meet the needs of its students is largely determined by the ability of the professional staff to manage these components in a creative and responsive manner.

Program change requires a systematic plan of action that clearly points out the specific tasks that need to be accomplished. Since the focus of the change is the revision of the educational program to better meet the needs of the early adolescent, a needs assessment should be conducted. At the same time student needs are being assessed, the attitudes of the professional staff toward the purposes of middle-level education should be determined. The information from these two sources becomes the basis for establishing the goals, purposes, and priorities for the school.

The extent to which a school is able to meet the needs of its students is largely determined by the ability of the professional staff to manage these components in a creative and responsive manner.

When these new school goals and purposes are compared to the current educational program, many discrepancies will be found. The identification of these discrepancies and inconsistencies becomes the first step in the curriculum revision program. With this information the principal and staff can begin to examine programs, strategies, and alternatives more suitable for meeting school goals. After considerable deliberation, the most appropriate programs are selected, and subsequently the specific skills needed by administrators and teachers to implement these programs successfully are identified.

Other important tasks in the planning stage include establishing timelines, determining management objectives, conceptualizing staff development programs, identifying evaluation procedures, and resources (funding, materials, and resource people).

B. Staff Development

Because most curricular changes require teachers and administrators to function differently, a comprehensive staff development program should be established. Upon completion of the planning

functions, specific staff development guidelines should be followed. They include:

1. Involve the *total staff* in the planning of the program.
2. Establish an *individualized staff development program* which promotes personalized growth for each teacher through a sequential completion of the following tasks:
   a) Identify specific classroom behaviors and skills required to implement the desired program changes.
   b) Evaluate each teacher's present classroom behavior and skill relative to desired behaviors.
   c) Identify the new skills each individual teacher should develop.
   d) Design for each teacher a personalized program for effecting changes in current behavior or skill (Clark and Clark, 1980).
3. Provide a *gradual program of progress*. (Do not expect too much too soon.) Utilize a "phase-in" approach.

Communication is an important element during the implementation stage. Opportunities for formal and informal interaction are necessary. Administrators must be highly visible in the support of the change and readily available to talk and work with staff.

4. Utilize a *variety of techniques* such as workshops, media, conferences, rap sessions, school visitations, etc.

After the new program has been initiated, careful consideration must be given to providing ongoing support of the program and people changes. Regular meetings to encourage teachers, solve problems, and increase skill levels should be conducted. Teachers should visit other schools where similar programs are in operation.

Staff development programs designed to involve the total staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating are important to the success of educational programs which are based on the needs of early adolescents. Successful staff development programs must provide teachers with opportunities for growth in developing new skills and assuming new roles.

C. Implementation

The development of a management system which includes task identification, personnel responsibilities, and timelines is a critical process that must be understood and monitored by the principal and staff. Program changes may successfully begin on a small scale and then gradually be integrated into the entire school through a three- to five-year plan.

Communication is an important element during the implementation stage. Opportunities for formal and informal interaction are necessary. Administrators must be highly visible in the support of the change and readily available to talk and work with staff.

D. Evaluation

Program evaluation presents a threat to implementers of new programs. When teachers and administrators are implementing a program with which they are not yet entirely comfortable they are not anxious to undergo the scrutiny of evaluation. For that reason, during the developmental period evaluation should be informal and designed to provide feedback for program revision. Such evaluation would include checklists on implementation progress; reports of teacher progress in acquiring new skills; and various measures of student, parent, teacher, administrator, and community attitudes and reactions toward the program.

This ongoing evaluation would result in continuous revision and modification of the program. Formal or summative evaluation would begin after the program was fully operational. Data gathered would include student progress toward specified objectives and the degree of progress the staff was making in accomplishing school goals and priorities.

The following tasks should be accomplished to assure a comprehensive evaluation process:

1. Determine appropriate procedures for evaluating all phases of the program;
2. Develop techniques for teacher-classroom evaluation that include self-appraisal, peer evaluation, and administrator evaluation;
3. Develop techniques for measuring student achievement in all areas of the curriculum;
4. Determine procedures for assessing the attitudes of students, teachers, administrators,

parents, and community groups toward the program; and

5. Establish procedures to ensure that evaluative feedback will be incorporated into curricular and program revision.

In the development of more responsive middle level educational programs where a major focus is on the changing teacher role in the classroom, evaluation performs a vital function. The mode of evaluation, whether videotape, peer observation, or some other procedure, should be determined by the teacher. The confidential nature of the data should be maintained. Emphasis should be how well each teacher is moving toward personally-specified objectives, not how well the teacher compares to other teachers. By analyzing data, teachers and administrators can readily determine successes, failures, and "trouble spots." Based on the feedback data, programs can be revised, objectives rewritten, time allocations extended, or new procedures developed.

Summary

Even the most casual observer of middle-level education can see that what the literature, the research, and the experts suggest as appropriate, and middle-level programs as they are currently implemented are not the same. For years educators have suggested flexible and varied schedules, instructional groupings, and teaching strategies appropriate for the emerging adolescent. Yet, recent studies continue to demonstrate a relatively low level of implementation of these strategies. Reticence to change—by administrators, faculty, community—inhibits the implementation of these strategies.

A comprehensive plan incorporating the ideas and concepts of systematic change must become an integral part of the school operation. *Status quo* is not acceptable. The administrator must promote people and program growth which remains contemporary with the research and issues of the middle level.

The following brief questionnaire is designed to assist principals in evaluating current programs and the appropriateness of change. Duplicate the items and assess your program and faculty attitudes. Then translate that information into statements of direction and need. Involve faculty in further assessment and long-range planning and begin a sequential approach toward school improvement.

The Middle-Level School

Listed below are several goals and characteristics often used to describe middle level educational programs. Read each statement, then assess the statement in two ways. First, mark the degree to which the statement *is appropriate* (IDEAL) in your present educational setting. Then mark the degree to which the statement *is being implemented* (REAL) in your present educational setting.

	Appropriateness in Present Setting				*Current Level of Implementation*			
	Not appropriate	*Somewhat appropriate*	*Appropriate*	*Very appropriate*	*No implementation*	*Low implementation*	*Adequate implementation*	*High implementation*
THE MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOL SHOULD:								
1. Incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of the basic skills courses in grades 7 and 8.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
2. Provide the opportunity for parents and students to select from programs representing a traditional subject-centered six- or seven-period day or a more nontraditional interdisciplinary approach.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
3. Provide learning processes which include practical approaches to individualizing the learning process through the utilization of small-group/large-group instruction and independent study.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
4. Provide a program centered around the developmental needs of the student rather than a traditional content-based program.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
5. Consider both the physical and emotional development of the students and thus provide differing types of extracurricular social programs for the students (parties, dances, etc.).	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6. Consider both the physical and emotional development of the students and thus provide athletic activities for the students (sports, intramurals, etc.).	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
7. Provide a curriculum of basic skills in English, math, science, and the social sciences.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
8. Provide a required reading program for all students at all grade levels.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
9. Provide a required exposure to exploratory courses in fine arts and practical arts.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
10. Provide a daily physical education program for all students which stresses conditioning activities and team and individual sports based upon the physical development level of the individual student.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

	Appropriateness in Present Setting				*Current Level of Implementation*			
	Not appropriate	*Somewhat appropriate*	*Appropriate*	*Very appropriate*	*No implementation*	*Low implementation*	*Adequate implementation*	*High implementation*
11. Provide a required health/sex education program for all students.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
12. Provide for the incorporation of values clarification, self-awareness, and group awareness into the basic curricular program.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
13. Provide opportunities for enrichment experiences for students.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
14. Provide opportunities for remediation experiences for students.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
15. Provide a co-curricular program of minicourses or special interest courses or programs offered during the school day on a regularly scheduled basis. (For example, once a week; twice a month.)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
16. Provide a time for school clubs or interest groups to meet during the school day on a regularly scheduled basis.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
17. Provide a teaching staff skilled in the ability to understand, relate to, and work with students of this age group.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
18. Provide appropriate planning times for members of the teaching staff, including common planning times for teaching teams.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
19. Provide a teacher-student guidance or advisory program which enables each student to relate and interact in a special way with his or her adviser (teacher).	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
20. Provide a grade reporting system which assesses students based upon individual ability and related progress and incorporates parent contacts and conferences.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
21. Utilize a school-wide schedule which includes blocks of time within which teachers have the flexibility to group students in varied ways for specific instructional purposes.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
22. Utilize community involvement in the ongoing school program by bringing community members and parents into the school and permitting students to explore the community from outside the school doors.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
23. Utilize multi-materials approaches to instruction, including both print and nonprint learning materials.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
24. Provide learning experiences at appropriate cognitive development levels: concrete, formal, etc.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

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OCTOBER 1981

Reorganizing Middle-level Education: What To Consider and How To Proceed

Ted A. Beranis

The middle school movement is, more than anything else, a reorganization of people and the ways in which they work with each other . . . a reorganization which is perceived as primarily a grade change, a different building, or redesigned curriculum will achieve very little.[1]

Transition from the traditional junior high school pattern to a middle school concept is a common topic in many school districts across this country. The momentum for change began about 20 years ago, took hold increasingly in the '70s, and continues to this day. The overriding reason for such change is not, as some would argue, the failure of traditional junior high schools to achieve their educational goals. Rather, middle school philosophy—and the reorganization it inspires—is one response of educators to complex societal factors which have forced redefinition and restructure of school programs in roughly the fifth through ninth grades.

The American junior high school model became popular between World Wars I and II, when educators decided that traditional K–8 elementary expectations differed too sharply from high school requirements. A school "in-between" with more concentrated academic training and a greater variety of student activity was needed. Junior high schools, created to provide early adolescents with experiences more closely reflecting the standards of achievement and the comprehensive programs of high schools, adopted sequential academic programs as the foundation for later high school studies and modeled their student activities on high school interests. Widely accepted, the "new" junior high schools (the majority enrolling seventh and eighth, or seventh, eighth, and ninth grades) achieved remarkable success through the '40s, '50s, and '60s.

As junior high schools became the standard for middle level education in more than 70 percent of

This issue of Schools in the Middle *describes how one school district reorganized its middle level schools. It is not presented as a recommendation for such a change but rather as a possible guide for those considering or involved in such a change.*

The fact that this kind of reorganization is a growing phenomenon must not be permitted to obscure the many so-called "traditional" middle level schools that have met and continue to meet the goals described. We would like to hear from any of our readers whose middle level school fits this latter description.

[1] Paul S. George, "Ten Steps Toward Implementing Effective Middle Schools," *NASSP Bulletin*, September 1977, p. 98.

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our nation's school districts, many programs became tradition-bound and, frequently, imitations of high schools.

In the late '60s new social forces—felt first at universities—affected secondary schools. University student protest and rebellion spread to high schools, and soon to junior high schools. At the same time, the youth drug culture evolved. These events, combined with public concern about what was thought to be eroding traditional standards of discipline and learning, caused many communities to conclude that traditional public junior and senior high schools, despite earlier success, were no longer successfully solving society's complicated problems. The crisis signaled the need for reevaluation of their purpose and structure.

Concerns Prompting Reorganization

As high schools met social challenges with increased supervision, expanded work/study programs, alternative programs, modified graduation requirements, redefined student activity programs, etc., many junior high schools responded by embracing middle school concepts as a meaningful guide.

The following factors have influenced many formerly traditional junior high schools to become middle schools:

- *Social Growth:* A desire to "put the brakes" on what some viewed as too early exposure to the complex social influences in typical high schools.
- *Gradualism:* A belief in the need for a less abrupt transition for elementary students, with the first middle level year reflecting the more familiar pattern of elementary experience rather than a future high school program.
- *Basic Academic Skills Reenforcement:* A rededication of emphasis on basic academic skills (reading, writing, math, spelling), particularly during the sixth and seventh grade years, with later and more gradual introduction to the specialized, departmentalized instruction still common to high schools.
- *More Attention to Student Guidance:* An interest in establishing more programs with specialized personnel, providing structured and expanded opportunity for the diagnosis, remediation, and guidance of student learning and social development in the middle years.
- *School Realignment:* A response to a general realignment of student attendance centers to meet the pressure of declining enrollment and closing schools, or of continuing growth.
- *Reaction to High School Dominance:* An alternative to perceived high school dominance in education decision making at the junior high level.
- *School Climate:* An attempt to humanize and create a more visible student-centered school in the middle years.
- *Improved Discipline:* A reply to community concern about perceived deteriorating student discipline in some junior and senior high schools.
- *Flexible Scheduling:* To meet staff interests for restructuring middle-years curriculum with greater emphasis on flexible blocks of time in which academic subjects may be broadly explored and art, music, vocational, physical, and service activities expanded.
- *Brain Growth Research:* Concern that traditional junior high school subject matter specialization may be inappropriate for middle level students. Recent scientific research reveals alternating periods of growth and plateau in the maturation of the brain, suggesting that educational delivery systems based on the theory that the brain "grows in a continuum" must be rethought.

The Critical Component: A Comprehensive Plan

With more than ten thousand middle schools expected in the United States by 1986, the coming decade may witness thousands of school leaders scurrying about in search of effective ways to carry out school board reorganization mandates.[2]

A comprehensive plan is critical to the orderly transition from junior high to middle school. It must present not only the philosophy and goals associated with the move, but it must also serve as a practical blueprint for each phase of the transition.

An effective transition plan has two main goals:

a. Provide a comprehensive and readable plan that communicates the overriding educational benefits of the proposed change to parents and the community.
b. Provide a reasonably detailed outline of the basic organizational patterns and program changes that must take place if the primary educational goals of the new middle school are to be, in fact, achieved.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

The often expressed concern that too many junior high to middle school transitions "reflect little more than a name change and reshuffling of grade level organizations"[3] recognizes that the absence of comprehensive planning and follow-through often results in middle schools with cosmetic rather than substantive organizational adjustments.

A transition plan must also:

- Clearly communicate educational goals.
- State specific advantages in the reorganization for students and parents.
- Repeat and reenforce the former values and programs which will be preserved in the reorganization.
- Provide a rationale for new elements in the school program.
- Address the impact of the school program on the continuity of educational goals as they relate to current elementary and high school programs.
- Reenforce continuing commitment to basic academic skills, pupil social development, and student guidance.
- Emphasize board of education and administration unity and commitment throughout the transition.
- Include evidence of teacher participation and recommendations.
- Avoid educational jargon.
- Define all educational terms used in the plan (a glossary).
- Contain a specific statement detailing the board of education's decision-making process which resulted in the directive for change.
- Record a summary of all major, and many minor, parent, community, and staff responses to the proposed middle school plan.

Outline of a Middle School Transition Plan

The "Report of the Junior High School Study Committee" of the Elmhurst, Ill., public schools has received wide praise as a model for transition to a middle school concept. The 37-page document details the background, planning, structure, and issues associated with Elmhurst's successful reorganization of its junior high schools in 1978.

The report details the recommendations of administrators and teachers who were charged with the task of drafting a plan for reorganizing the district's three traditional 7–8 junior highs to 6–7–8 units reflecting middle school philosophy and programs.

The table of contents is provided here as a general guide for those districts now formulating plans of their own. The comments in this article are based on the author's experience with this plan. (Readers can obtain copies of the Elmhurst report by sending $1 with a self-addressed 9 × 10 envelope bearing 40 cents in U.S. postage to George Melton, NASSP, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091.)

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[3]Donald C. Clark and Jerry W. Valentine, "Middle Level Educational Programs: Making the Ideal a Reality," *Schools in the Middle*, June 1981, p. 3.

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Transition Initiative and Decision

We must establish goals for our middle level educational programs—based on sound understanding of the students involved—and develop the most conducive teacher-learning environment possible.[4]

The most successful junior high to middle school transitions occur when the initiative for the conversion has been taken by the community, through its board of education, with leadership and commitment from the superintendent and central office administrators. In few instances have teachers or parent groups been able to alter traditional middle level programs when school boards have remained indifferent or the central office staff has extended only token support. Without top-level support no transition has much chance for lasting success.

Studies show that reorganization to a middle school concept is often initiated for reasons indirectly related to the educational concepts associated with middle school theory. Desire for improved education for early adolescents should be the motivation for transition; but other social and economic forces frequently set such reorganization into motion. In some areas pressure for racial integration has been a factor. In others, enrollment declines or increases, or school closings or consolidations dictate the change. Affluent school districts with reputations for innovation sometimes embrace middle school reorganization as "functional, front-running, and fashionable."

Information that clearly establishes the reasons for change should be discussed with the public if any such initiative is to gain support. If political reasons exist—such as the need to close schools due to declining enrollment—they must be brought into the open.

Those few districts who can point proudly to successful "mandated" transitions to middle school concepts, "set in place" in a short time, are to be credited more for their luck than their leadership. Arbitrary, hasty, heavy-handed methods often breed resentment. Resistance can fester to undermine short-term gains, and, in many cases, assure long-term reversal or strangulation of well-meaning goals.

Experience suggests that a three-year cycle is needed for a transition to put down substantial roots for future success and growth. The first year should set the stage for staff and parent awareness, general discussion, general goal setting, etc. In the second year the district should begin following a clear-cut decision by the board of education that a middle school program be adopted and a timetable established for the implementation, which begins with direction for developing a comprehensive written plan. The planning year provides for discussion and debate of the details about how the program is to be set in place, not the decision to move to the middle school program which is resolved during the first year. The third year sets the transition in place with emphasis on orientation and objective assessment of results.

[4]R. Stephen Teagarden, "Implications of the Middle School for Elementary, Secondary Education," *NASSP Bulletin*, October 1976, p. 92.

Key Concerns in Transition Planning

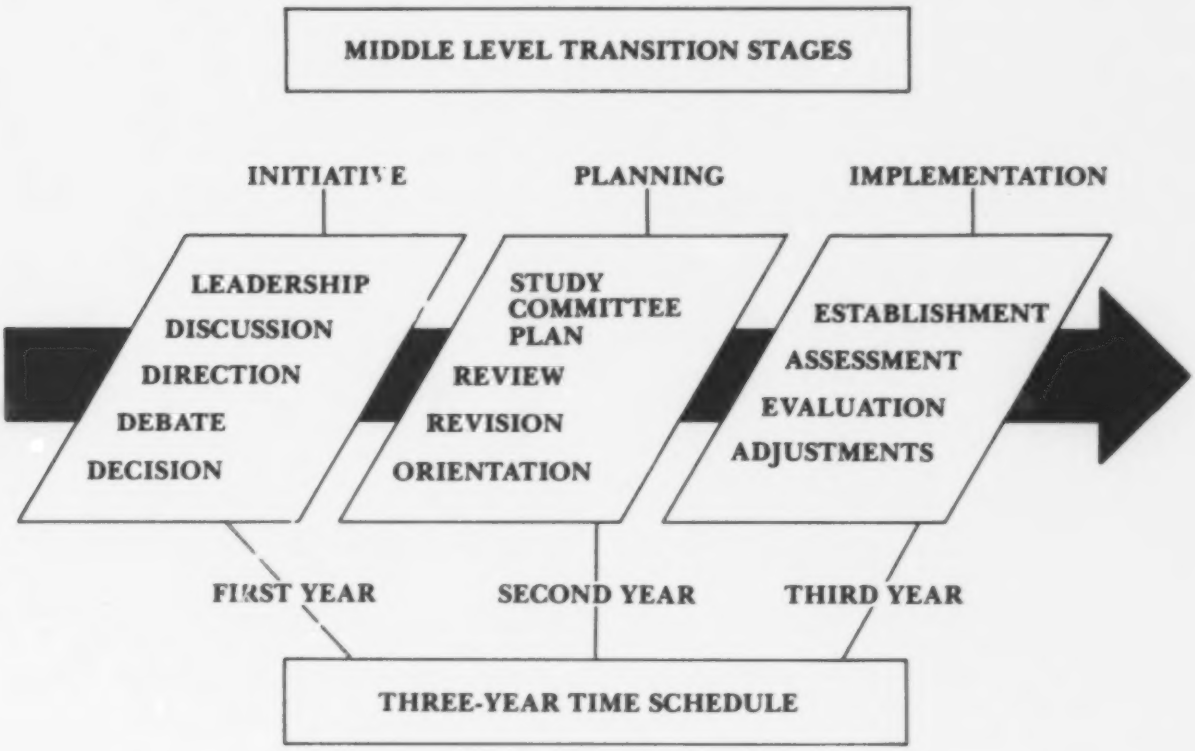
(The middle school) years are seen as years of education in transition. The program within the educational organization must reflect the gradual change which is occurring in the ability and learning style of each student.[5]

The old adage, "Have a plan and work that plan!" applies. Highly generalized, sketchy, or vague plans will produce disappointing, ill-defined, token results. The test of a good transition plan is whether it may be expected to serve as a practical, working guide over a long period of time including the preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages.

A carefully thought out written plan directly and effectively addresses the following:

- *Concrete educational goals:* Several clearly written, fundamental educational goals need to be stated.
- *Transitional goals:* Elementary teachers must have some say in how well the first middle school year complements and reinforces the students' previous elementary experience. Similarly, middle school students should bring to high school programs appropriate attitudes, habits, and skills with an improved foundation for academic work.
- *Administrator/Board leadership:* No reorganization plan can succeed for more than a brief time without the board of education and superintendent exhibiting unified support for the transition throughout each critical stage in its inception. Principals from all school levels should be members of the planning committee and outspoken advocates for the adoption of the plan.
- *Parent goals:* Parents want the best possible educational experience for their students in an orderly and disciplined school setting.
- *Staff motivation:* A move to middle school organization must do more than meet teacher goals (for example, opening up the curriculum, more schedule flexibility, students and groups that create more "planning time," etc.). However well intentioned, such changes are often misunderstood by parents or viewed as not clearly related to better instruction. On the other hand, when a plan has been formulated which is in tune with parent and community perceptions of student needs many resources may be tapped to develop teacher enthusiasm and ease staff anxiety.
- *Use of the written plan:* Circulation of the detailed written plan is second only to board and superintendent decisiveness and commitment as the most important ingredient for successful change. Do not fail to include a comprehensive glossary of educational terms used in the plan.
- *Timetable for a transition:* A published timetable that reflects a realistic perception of the staff work required is critical to the effort. Districts that have made the transition successfully suggest that three years is the optimum time span for conversion (see chart). The process can be credibly completed in two years if unusual circumstances require it. A one-year effort is not advised.
- *Gradualism:* It is important that the first year of middle school not be too different from the students' elementary experience. Change is best handled if it comes in small steps and leads to increasingly more complex and demanding learning. Programs should be designed so that students are not too rapidly exposed to the academic pace and social activity common and appropriate for high school age students. This is accomplished in many middle level schools by a first-year program which reflects the self-contained elementary experience; a second year that cautiously moves into greater subject specialization; and a final year which more nearly reflects the departmentalized study of most high schools.
- *Community presentations:* Unrehearsed, ill-prepared, and poorly presented reports to community members have been responsible for the defeat of otherwise sound and reasonable proposals for school reorganization. Care should be taken in organizing community presentations that consider the importance of using simple language in setting forth the goals of the proposed school program. Carefully prepared visuals, clearly written handouts, and clarifying charts are critical to the success of community presentations.
- *Attention to pacing:* Do not make the mistake of attempting "too much, too soon," or "overselling" the public on too many idealized middle school features. Achieving all the attractive goals associated with middle school ideals in any one school is unlikely. Enthusiasm for the idealized middle school should be tempered

[5] "The Report of the Junior High School Study Committee." Elmhurst, Ill. Unit School District #205, November 1977.



with patience and understanding about the nurturing that such ideas require.

- *Follow-up assessment:* A comprehensive attitude and program study at the conclusion of the first year is advised. Experience indicates that the results will reveal greater enthusiasm and acceptance for the middle school than expected. Such a report, related directly to the main goals of the transition plan, can further neutralize the remaining skeptics. The assessment must also candidly address those goals which have not met with reasonable success in the first year so that efforts may be directed to the sections of the original plan that may need revision or reenforcement.

Transitional Issues Comment

The extent to which a school is able to meet the needs of its students is largely determined by the ability of the professional staff to manage these components in a creative and responsive manner.[6]

The following items relate to major concerns of schools exploring middle level conversion:

WHICH GRADES TO INCLUDE Most educators accept grades six through eight as most appropriate for adaptation to middle school concept. The assumption that the ninth grade properly belongs in a four-year high school setting has gained support recently. Three-year 6–8 grade organizations have been widely adopted, particularly when former junior high school ninth grades have been moved into high schools. Experience shows that heated community debate is more likely to erupt when proposals are made to move former elementary grade levels into junior high settings. Ninth grade moves to high school generally meet with less opposition.

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS Do not underestimate this major concern among students, parents, and high school personnel. Unfortunately, the issue is often simplistically reduced to a "intramural versus interscholastic" controversy. Realistically, program planning in this area should be approached with the intent to correct the abuses of interscholastic dominance that have occurred in

[6]Clark and Valentine, *Schools in the Middle*, p. 1.

some junior high schools, often due to considerable high school and community pressure. A balanced approach preserves the school spirit that interscholastic athletics builds and, at the same time, encourages individual sports experience through intramurals.

Social Activities Parents generally agree that early adolescent social development and interaction should be approached cautiously and controlled carefully. Parents prefer, with few exceptions, that entering middle level students are spared organized social activities other than those that are outgrowths of classroom work such as holiday room parties, field trips, field days, etc. It is wise to downplay the social activities of entering middle level students.

Activity Participation Many parents frequently complain that students are involved in too many activities, yet most want the schools to offer many opportunities for student exploration. Experienced principals report initial parent reservations about first-year middle level students participating in school activities which include older students; however, this attitude changes quickly as confidence builds in the school program.

Home for Lunch Generally, there are more advantages to requiring all students to remain at school for lunch. This requirement is an advantage for the flexible scheduling of such activities as homeroom, intramurals, band, etc.

Locations of Classes in the Building A building plan that places entering students in a separate area from older students relieves parent anxiety about younger students entering what was previously a junior high school. It is misleading to suggest to parents that entering students are easily isolated from contact with older students. However, locating a sixth grade in homerooms and/or classrooms in one wing or on one floor, or in a central area for most core activities can do much to reassure parents that student exposure to programs at the middle school will indeed be gradual, secure, and carefully monitored.

Special Education Services Special education services are delivered in varying ways at different school levels for generally good reasons. It is important that special education services at the entry level to a middle level school are carefully designed to reflect the setting of the elementary school program, easing the transition for students and lowering the anxiety of their parents.

Guidance Services Student and parent guidance services are potent selling points. Parents readily accept the need for a comprehensive program of personalized guidance that promises close ties with teachers as advisers, guidance services, and increased attention to personalized parent communication. Values instruction and group guidance by qualified personnel are also viewed favorably.

Academic Subject Grouping Early middle level programs should closely identify with traditional elementary school grouping patterns. The inclusion of an elementary grade in a previously departmentalized junior high school permits an overlap of elementary reading and math materials, easing student transition in these academic skills. Pupils can begin middle school in the same academic series and grouping where they ended their elementary experience, reviewing and then moving ahead from that point. Another benefit is that middle school teachers are using learning materials which are identical to those in use by their elementary colleagues.

Grouping of Students in Homerooms Some parents initially want students from each feeding elementary school grouped in middle level homerooms. Advocates assume students will be more comfortable with youngsters they already know. Teachers have long been aware that familiarity with any one group of students for three or four years in an elementary school can have as many negative as positive effects. Placing students in homerooms by previous elementary associations should be avoided. After the first month of the new experience, parents often comment on how beneficial making new friends and identification with new groups has been. Rarely does a parent comment that a student misses continuing close identification with his or her elementary peer group.

Grade Level Organization Grade level organization is fundamental to the full realization of the middle school program. With grade level—as opposed to departmental—organization, new staff working relations are possible, teaming opportunities expand, and the dominance of department chairmen in program planning can be shifted to grade level coordinators.

Flexible Scheduling While flexible scheduling may have advantages for middle school programs, it need not be a component in every middle school organization. In practice, most of the

important educational goals in middle school philosophy can be met effectively within either flexible, blocked schedules or traditional, uniform classtime daily schedules. For example, enthusiasm about what can be accomplished if students meet in science for one full morning a week instead of three 45-minute classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday is, more often than not, dampened by experience. However well meaning the purpose is for regularly extending the length of time for one learning experience or another, it is rare that middle level age students' interest and productive participation can be maintained for more than 45 minutes.

Transition Dividends

We can . . . build an articulated program bridging the middle grade-high school continuum which responds to actual learning capacities.[7]

The reorganization of a middle level school presents opportunities to do much that might be difficult to achieve in many traditional programs.

ENTHUSIASM AND INVOLVEMENT An effectively planned transition can get parents, staff, and administrators caught up in an exciting climate for change. Even those who might not be expected to show interest in the effort frequently become involved. If the advantages of the change are articulately and realistically expressed, enthusiasm will be contagious. The comments of those relatively few individuals who withhold support and remain negative about the transition must, of course, be evaluated for substance, addressed when appropriate, but blunted with firm yet respectful response. The key is the ability of the majority to support and work toward the stated educational goals of a transition that clearly benefits students.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT The transition process is an invigorating experience for many teachers, even some who express initial anxiety. Grade level reorganization, a common element in the move, with its altered perspective on building leadership, decentralized responsibility among staff, and encouragement of team effort, expands opportunities for teacher communication. The combination of teacher insights and experience from both elementary and junior high schools is one of the most consistently cited benefits of reorganization.

ENHANCED ADMINISTRATIVE IMAGE AND SUPPORT The principal must assume the leadership role in moderating anxieties and motivating all to achieve the goals of the transition plan. Principals who have come through the process frequently refer to it as the most challenging, stimulating, and rewarding leadership opportunity they have been presented in their careers.

SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT Properly planned and executed, districts consistently report that the transition process is followed by an overwhelming sense of achievement. Professional staff members rarely express any regrets about the change; they generally describe the reorganization as worthwhile.

RENEWED CONFIDENCE Principals report an unexpected dividend. When inevitable follow-up changes are required, teachers appear less anxious about accepting possible new procedures. Apparently the confidence gained in working through a major transition creates more willingness on everyone's part to recognize that adaptability, not the status quo, is the key to preserving the traditional values we all hold for American secondary education.

[7]Conrad F. Toepfer, "Brain Growth Periodization: Implications for Middle Grades Education," *Schools in the Middle*, April 1981.

OCTOBER 1983

Staff Development Programs for Middle Level Schools

Donald C. Clark
Sally N. Clark

Middle level schools have yet to establish programs responsive to the needs of early adolescents, according to the findings of recent studies. Middle level schools are highly structured, with a strong preference for standard-sized classes (15-35 students) and traditional high school type schedules; and little evidence reveals programs, such as interdisciplinary team teaching and exploratory experiences, that are typically recommended for middle level schools (Valentine, et al., 1981).

The continuation of traditional programs in middle level schools can be attributed to two major factors:

- Most schools or colleges of education fail to offer programs that focus on the preparation of qualified middle level teachers and administrators.
- The hierarchy in many public school systems places secondary school teachers and administrators in middle level schools to await their turn for openings at the high school level. This practice siphons off successful staff members and establishes the principle that the road to advancement and success is found in the high school.

Given these two factors, it is clear that staff development programs are of major importance. Staff development offers the opportunity for both administrators and teachers to identify appropriate programs for middle level students and to develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will serve as the basis for program development.

The Nature of Staff Development

Staff development is more than just inservice education or retraining. Dale (1982) defines staff development "as the totality of education and professional experiences that contribute toward an individual's being more competent and satisfied in an assigned professional role." He believes that the functions of a staff development program should include: inservice education (i.e., skill improvement, curriculum implementation, increasing effectiveness), organizational development (climate, problem solving, communication), consultation (conducting workshops, assisting with planning, and organizing staff development programs), communication and coordination (interbuilding communication, information, centralized coordination), leadership (seed planting, problem solving, suggestions, researching) and evaluation (needs assessment, resource and program evaluation).

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Ten major assumptions underlying staff development programs have been developed by Wood, McQuarrie, and Thompson (1982). These assumptions, which are helpful in identifying key elements of successful programs, are:

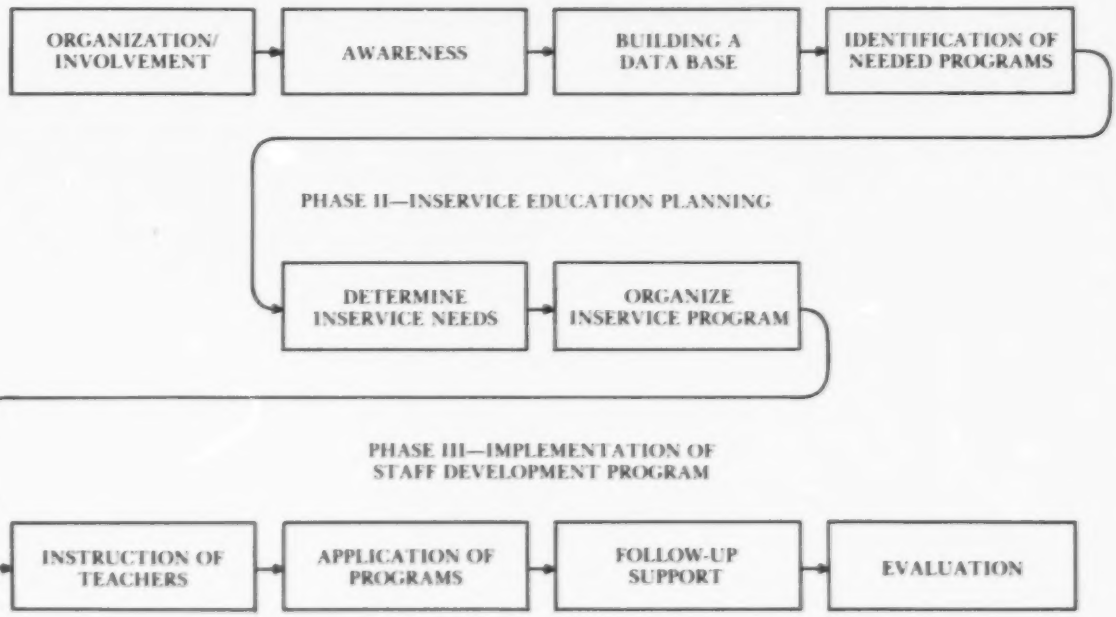
1. All school personnel need inservice throughout their careers.
2. Significant improvement in educational practice takes considerable time and long-term inservice programs.
3. Inservice education should focus on improving the quality of school programs.
4. Educators are motivated to learn new things when they have some control over their learning and are free from threat.
5. Educators vary widely in their competencies and readiness to learn.
6. Professional growth requires commitment to new performance norms.
7. School climate influences the success of professional development.
8. The school is the most appropriate unit or target of change in education.
9. School districts have the primary responsibility for providing the resources for inservice training.
10. The principal is the key element for adop-

Figure 1

CHART OF ACTIVITIES

STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

PHASE I—PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



tion and continued use of new practices and programs in a school.

The importance of the principal in the planning of a comprehensive staff development program cannot be overemphasized. As a leader, he must be able to show a strong commitment to the middle level school and its basic purposes. He must also be able to get others involved and committed. As a consultant, the principal must be knowledgeable about early adolescents and aware of suitable programs for meeting their needs. Communication and coordination skills are necessary for involving others in the process of change and in keeping that process an ongoing, productive endeavor.

In short, principals hold the key to successful staff development. They are the prime movers in the school, and their attitudes toward inservice establish the climate for success.

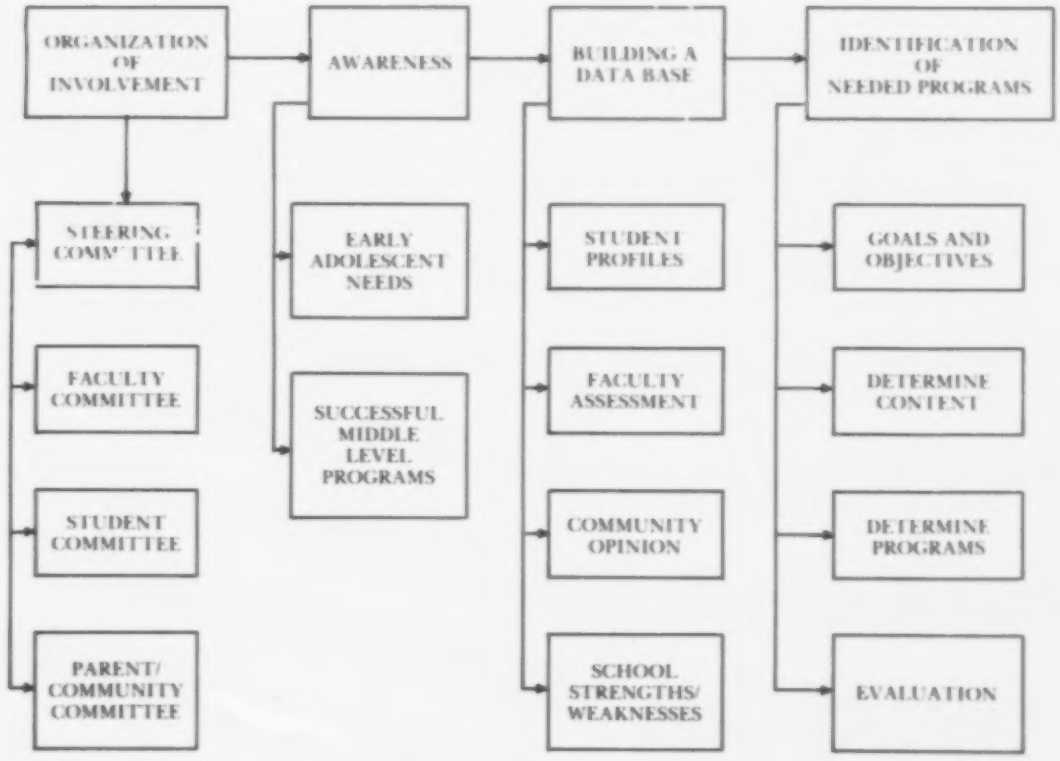
Staff development is a complex process that requires a comprehensive and systematic plan. In the remaining pages of this issue we will provide some guidelines for middle level principals who want to establish staff development programs that will make their schools more respon-

Figure 2

CHART OF ACTIVITIES

PHASE I

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



sive to the needs of early adolescents.

Organizing the Staff Development Program

In most middle level schools the staff development program focuses on two major factors: improvement of the school program to better meet the needs of the early adolescent; and development of new attitudes, skills, and knowledge by the professional staff. The model for staff development shown in Figure 1 concentrates on these two factors.

Phase I—Program Development

Program Development includes the four major components of Involvement, Awareness, Fact Finding, and Program Identification (see Figure 2). Unfortunately, many middle level educators ignore this first phase when they consider inservice programs. Their focus tends to be on "what skills do we now need" rather than on what programs are needed to better meet the needs of early adolescents.

Social, emotional, and attitudinal needs are much more difficult to measure and profile. However, since one of the major goals of middle level education is to assist the early adolescent in making a smoother social and emotional adjustment, educators must consider these important areas.

Organization of Involvement

Successful staff development programs usually involve a number of related groups or individuals in the information-gathering, decision-making, and planning processes. We believe that a broad base of involvement is important, and we recommend that the following four groups be involved in the program development process:

- Faculty Committee
- Student Committee
- Parent/Community Committee
- Steering Committee

The faculty committee is drawn from key members of the staff, people who are committed to the concept of school improvement. The faculty committee functions as a resource to the other committees, supplying information and guidance as needed.

The student committee, which is drawn from a cross-section of the school population, serves primarily as a sounding board for questions and ideas presented by teachers, parents, and community members. The student committee also actively represents the students' interests and desires by making recommendations to the steering committee. The leadership of this committee should be vested in a student selected by the other student members. A teacher should be selected to serve as an adviser.

It is important that parents and community members be involved in the fact-finding and decision-making processes. The parent/community committee, which consists of interested parents and a few recognized community leaders, exists to provide advice and recommendations, support, constructive criticism, and a liaison with the community. Members of this committee must have a clear understanding of the early adolescent and appropriate middle level programs.

The last committee is the steering committee. This committee, which is composed of representatives from the other three committees, makes decisions, establishes time lines, and determines responsibilities. This committee coordinates all facets of the staff development program.

It is important that these four committees function effectively. All members must feel that there is a real need for their involvement and participation, and all members must have a clear sense of the committee's direction. *During the initial meeting the principal must establish with each committee its purposes and goals.* The principal should also clarify the functions of each committee, the authority of the committee, and the availability of resources. Also to be clarified should be lines of communication, leadership selection, and deadlines.

Awareness

At the awareness stage of program development, the primary purpose is to expand the knowledge of the professional staff and parent/community committee about the needs of early adolescents and desirable programs for meeting these needs. The purpose at this stage is to take a

broad look at needs and programs; specifics will come later. The principal plays a primary role by carefully guiding the staff and committee members through a variety of learning experiences.

Some techniques that have been used successfully include:

1. Seed planting—giving ideas and suggestions to key teachers, parents, and community members.

Based on the student profile, faculty opinion should be assessed in terms of preferred programs and the practicality and desirability of implementing these programs in their school.

2. Articles—duplication of articles, for distribution, on issues in middle level education.
3. Books—purchase of middle level books and materials.
4. Workshops—use of consultants and media presentations.
5. Conferences—sending teachers, parents, and community members to local and regional middle level conferences.
6. Visitations—visits or interchanges with other middle level schools.
7. Study groups—groups of teachers, parents, and community members organized to study and report to the faculty on their findings.

At the end of the awareness stage the staff and the parent/community committee should have a general knowledge of early adolescent intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs; and programs that have been successfully implemented by other schools. Armed with this knowledge, the committees are now ready to organize for the fact-finding and decision-making processes.

Building a Data Base

It is now time to obtain specific information about the students, the school, and the community. Methods of doing so include student assessments and profiles, parent and community surveys, faculty opinion questionnaires, and school program evaluation. The data collected from these sources will serve as the basis for decision making and program development.

Student Profiles

The first step in this process is to build a profile of the students attending the school. This profile is developed from a variety of sources, but should include information about academic achievement, grades, socioeconomic status, special needs and problems, self-concept, and attitudes toward teachers and the school.

Achievement data are readily available from standardized tests. It is also important that some kind of criterion-referenced testing be used to measure how well students are performing compared to locally established goals and objectives. A third source of student achievement data is grades. When grades are considered along with standardized and criterion-referenced tests, a fairly accurate achievement profile can be developed for each student, and a composite profile can be developed for the school.

Social, emotional, and attitudinal needs are much more difficult to measure and profile. However, since one of the major goals of middle level education is to assist the early adolescent in making a smoother social and emotional adjustment, educators must consider these important areas. Many instruments have been developed, but perhaps the easiest to use and to administer is the 100-question *Mid-Years Opinion Questionnaire* compiled by Thornburg (1980). This instrument provides information about perceived anonymity, perceived victimization, dating behavior, self-esteem, student activities, health attitudes, preferred teacher characteristics, social rules, parental influence, generational differences, and parent and teacher power.

Another area of importance is student attitude toward school and its various functions. An excellent instrument for determining attitudes

Highest priority should be given to those programs that are intended to meet student needs determined to be most crucial. . . . A time line should be established. Lower priority programs could then be phased in as funding becomes available.

toward school is the *Semantic Distance Questionnaire* developed by Weaver (Shaw and Wright, 1967). This questionnaire, which uses a Likert-type scale, measures attitudes toward classrooms, rules, teachers, school, studying, and study hall. Indications of student attitudes can also be gained by examining attendance and tardiness data.

To complete the student profile, it is important to examine the cumulative folders of the students in the school. Such information as socioeconomic status, family and cultural backgrounds, and special needs are usually recorded in the folders. This, combined with the results of questionnaires, can give staff members a good indication of student needs.

Faculty Assessment

Data from the faculty are needed in two areas: opinions regarding the needs of the early adolescents at their school and attitudes toward middle level innovations and their practicality for implementation in their school. To gain faculty opinions regarding student needs, each faculty member could be asked "to list (on a sheet of paper) the needs of the students in this school." These lists could then be compiled into categories and restated on a Likert-scale type questionnaire (agree-disagree). Analysis of the data would provide a picture of faculty perception of needs which could be compared with the already developed composite profile of the students. Any discrepancies would serve as a forum for discussion.

In the awareness phase, the faculty had an opportunity to acquire information about early adolescents and the types of middle level programs developed to meet their needs. Based on the student profile, faculty opinion should be assessed in terms of preferred programs and the practicality and desirability of implementing these programs in their school.

The identification of new program skills and knowledge and necessary resources—when combined with an assessment of existing teacher skills, knowledge, and available resources—provides a clear picture of inservice needs.

One of the better instruments is the *Middle-Level School* (Clark and Valentine, 1981). This instrument lists 24 goals and characteristics of middle level schools and asks educators to rate them in terms of appropriateness in present setting, and current level of implementation. Data obtained from this instrument can give a good indication of the educational preferences of the staff and the degree to which those preferences are currently being implemented.

Community Opinion

It is also important to determine parental and community opinion regarding the middle level school. This can be done in several ways. Perhaps the easiest procedure is to develop a brief questionnaire that asks for opinions about various school issues such as grading procedures, course offerings, requirements and electives, student activities, and discipline policies. Another method is the community meeting. A series of meetings are scheduled where parents and community members meet in large and small groups to share their opinions about the schools. Regardless of the approach used, it is very important for the faculty to have valid information about the opinions of parents and community members.

Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses

Representatives of all of the populations affiliated with the school should have an opportunity to participate in a general assessment of the school. To do this, the following three-question survey should be given to the faculty, selected students, parents, and community members:

1. What are the strengths of this school?
2. What are the weaknesses of this school?
3. What recommendations would you make for correcting the weaknesses?

Answers to these questions will augment the data already collected and will provide a clearer picture of the agreements and disagreements among the various groups involved in the school.

A broad data base, while time-consuming to acquire, will serve as an excellent basis for program decision making.

Identification of Needed Programs

Teacher and parent/community committees, using the data collected as a basis for planning, must proceed through the following steps:

Identify Goals and Objectives; Determine Content (scope and sequence, required and elective courses); Determine Programs (strategies, activities); Establish Evaluation Procedures.

The importance of the principal in the planning of a comprehensive staff development program cannot be overemphasized. As a leader, he must be able to show a strong commitment to the middle level school and its basic purposes. He must also be able to get others involved and committed.

The activities in the planning process are coordinated by the steering committee. This includes setting time lines, providing resources, and assigning responsibility for the compilation and writing of the final plan. The planning process should be systematic. For each step the procedure should include:

- Teacher, parent/community, and student committees (meeting separately) prepare recommendations.
- Committees submit recommendations to steering committee.
- Steering committee compiles recommendations.
- Steering committee sends recommendations to teacher and parent/community committees, and to the entire faculty for approval.
- Steering committee prepares final report.

The following suggestions will facilitate the planning process:

1. Goals and objectives should be separated into intellectual/academic, social/emotional, and physical areas.
2. Content selection should relate to the same three categories.
3. Content selection should be organized around basic requirements, exploratory requirements, and elective offerings.
4. The identification of appropriate programs should also be categorized into the three areas of student needs.
5. Evaluation should include the identification of appropriate measures of student performance and procedures for monitoring the success of various program components.

A final area to be considered is the budget. If the resources are not available to fund all of the new programs, the various committees should be asked to place the programs in priority order. Highest priority should be given to those programs that are intended to meet student needs determined to be most crucial. To make sure that all of the programs identified are eventually implemented, a time line should be established. Lower priority programs could then be phased in as funding becomes available.

PHASE II—INSERVICE EDUCATION PLANNING

The second phase of the model focuses on the inservice or training aspects of staff development. Included in this phase are the analysis of inservice needs and the organization and planning of the inservice programs.

Determining Inservice Needs Necessitated by Program Changes

Identify Needed Skills and Knowledge

It is necessary to examine each new program in terms of required knowledge, new skills, and resources. For instance, if a decision is made to initiate a computer literacy program, there will be a need for teachers with knowledge of computers. Adviser/advisee programs require teachers with special human relations skills, while a learning activity package program would require the development of new materials.

Goals and objectives, which are established by the staff, should reflect the previously determined needs. The goals should be broad statements of intent, while the objectives should be much more specific.

Assess Teacher Skills and Knowledge

Once the skills, knowledge, and materials required by the new programs are identified, it is necessary to determine the degree to which the skills and knowledge are possessed by the teaching staff. This can be done by listing them and asking teachers to circle one of the following choices: 1) very knowledgeable or skilled, 2) somewhat knowledgeable or skilled, 3) not knowledgeable or skilled. For the same items teachers should also be asked to respond to the following: 1) desire inservice, 2) do not desire inservice.

Before specific methods and strategies are discussed, it is important to pursue the area of learning styles. For years educators have advocated individualized/personalized instruction for students. . . . Personalizing the inservice program for teachers and administrators is equally defensible.

Determine Needed Materials

The availability of materials for new programs must also be determined. Using the list of necessary resources, an inventory should be taken to ascertain what materials are already available and what materials will have to be purchased or developed in curriculum workshops.

The identification of new program skills and knowledge and necessary resources—when combined with an assessment of existing teacher skills, knowledge, and available resources—provides a clear picture of inservice needs.

Organize Inservice Program

The inservice program planning process includes the following five components:

1. Establish goals and objectives
2. Identify resources
3. Determine methods/strategies/modes of delivery
4. Set time lines
5. Determine evaluation procedures.

Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives, which are established by the staff, should reflect the previously determined needs. The goals should be broad statements of intent, while the objectives should be much more specific. For example, a goal and accompanying objectives for inservice in team teaching would be:

Goal—Establish an inservice program for training in the skills necessary for successful team teaching.

Objectives—Each teacher team will demonstrate skill in:

- using time flexibility—by developing schedules to be used the first month of school.
- grouping—by developing procedures for placing students in small groups.
- content sequencing and integration—by sequencing their content and identifying areas for integration of subject areas.
- using a variety of instructional techniques—by identifying techniques most suitable for large group, small group, or directed (independent) study and by matching these techniques with content area concepts.

Resources

Resources must be considered carefully. In Phase II of the National Study of Schools in the Middle, more than 50 percent of the principals surveyed indicated that they used consultants as a resource for their inservice programs (Valentine, et al., 1983). If it is decided that a consultant is needed, care should be taken in selecting that consultant. The following should be given careful consideration:

1. Does his or her philosophy of middle level education fundamentally agree with that held by the school and the district?
2. Does he or she have the ability to inspire and motivate teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents?
3. Is he or she approachable?
4. What successful experiences does he or she have in other middle level schools which have attempted to establish similar programs?
5. Is he or she willing to get involved personally in the program and make a long-term commitment to the school of at least one to two years? (Clark and Clark, 1974.)

The consultant should become a part of the steering committee and participate fully in the planning process. As a continuing participant in

the inservice program, the consultant will assume several roles: adviser, motivator, listener, and reinforcer.

Many other resources are available for those schools deciding not to use consultants. Books and pamphlets have been written on the topic of middle level education, and various media presentations (videotapes, sound filmstrips, and films) are available through professional organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Middle School Association. Private firms have also developed many materials that are available for purchase.

School visits are also an excellent resource for teachers wishing to acquire new skills. The schools selected for visits should be successfully practicing those concepts to be implemented. In some areas it may be difficult to find schools nearby that have good examples of middle level programs. In such cases other resources must be selected.

Local, regional, and national conferences are another valuable resource.

Methods/Strategies of Delivery

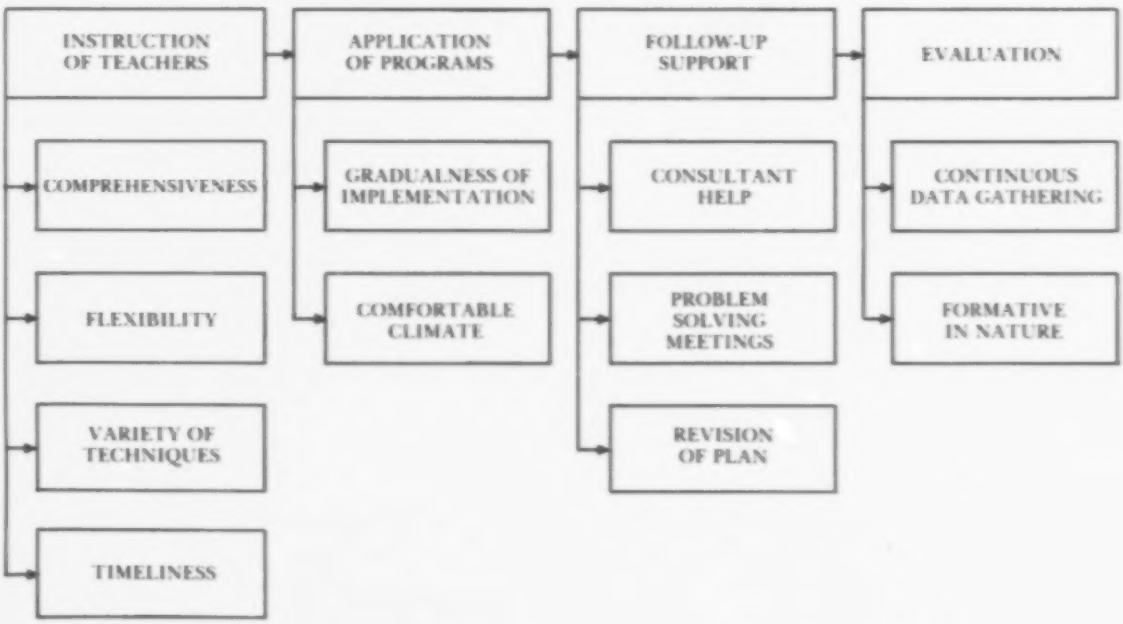
The best methods of inservice delivery must now be determined. Before specific methods and strategies are discussed, it is important to

Figure 3

CHART OF ACTIVITIES

PHASE III

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



pursue the area of learning styles. For years educators have advocated individualized/personalized instruction for students. We believe that personalizing the inservice program for teachers and administrators is equally defensible.

A key step to personalization is the diagnosis of teacher learning style. Many instruments may be used, but one of the best is a 67-item questionnaire developed by Joseph Renzulli of the University of Connecticut. The instrument is easy to administer and score, and it gives a rough estimate of preferences for various learning activities.

In addition to the diagnosis of learning preferences, a personalized inservice program requires that the identified needs of each teacher be the focus of each program. It is necessary to develop with each teacher a personalized retraining program that will assist in acquiring new skills and in modifying current classroom behavior.

The activities in the planning process are coordinated by the steering committee. This includes setting time lines, providing resources, and assigning responsibility for the compilation and writing of the final plan.

Five modes of inservice are listed in *Practical Applications of Research* (March 1983). They are:

1. *Job-embedded.* This mode, which allows teachers to learn while actually on the job, includes committee work, team teaching, work with consultants, and professional reading and curriculum analysis.
2. *Job-related.* This mode provides for workshops where teachers work together with resource people to solve problems of interest to the group, and for teacher exchange experiences, where a teacher is temporarily assigned to a different school to benefit from new ideas and new interactions.
3. *Credential-oriented.* This mode is used mainly by those seeking advanced certificates or degrees.
4. *Professional organization-related.* This mode represents the responsibility of professional associations to assist their members in remaining current in the relevant field of study.
5. *Self-directed.* This mode views teachers as self-motivated professionals who are interested in maintaining and improving their own skills through self-initiated activities.

Of the five, the two most commonly found modes of inservice are job-embedded and job-related. Many of the job-embedded components of committee work, team teaching, work with consultants, and professional reading and curriculum analysis have already been discussed. These components are the ones so necessary in the organization, assessment, and planning processes of staff development.

On the other hand, the job-related mode (workshops, problem solving, and school visits) is the heart of the inservice program. The creative use of this mode provides for a personalized inservice program.

Time Lines

Two important aspects concerning time that must be considered when planning the inservice program are the timing of the program (when), and deadlines.

Scheduling inservice sessions is always a problem. One approach is to include an inservice period as part of the regular day; another is to set aside several days a year. Some schools pay teachers during the summer months. Deadlines are necessary to keep the program moving toward the goals of implementation.

Once the skills, knowledge, and materials required by the new programs are identified, it is necessary to determine the degree to which the skills and knowledge are possessed by the teaching staff.

Evaluation

The final stage of the organization process is determining evaluation procedures. This is done

by referring to the goals and objectives established in the initial stage of organization. The important concern at this point is gathering data on how well the inservice program is meeting its objectives. An elaborate plan or document is not necessary.

Phase III—Implementation of the Staff Development Program

The planning process, which included the development of a new school program (Phase I), and a new inservice program (Phase II), has now been completed. It is time to move to Phase III, the implementation of the program. The implementation phase of this model is concerned with:

1. Instruction of teachers—the implementation of the inservice program
2. Application of programs—the implementation of the new program
3. Follow-up support—the support services given to teachers and administrators as they implement the programs
4. Evaluation—the collection of data as specified in Phases I and II.

These four steps provide for the systematic application of previous planning to the implementation process (Figure 3).

Instruction of Teachers

The steering committee should use the plan established in Phase II to initiate the inservice program. It is important not to get carried away with the comprehensiveness of the program and forget the importance of meeting the individual needs of those involved. Variety and timeliness of experiences are keys to success in the inservice process.

Application of Programs

The programs identified and planned in Phase I can now be implemented. The steering committee should include in its implementation strategy a gradual program of progress. Adequate time must be provided for each person to grow at a comfortable rate. It appears that, for many teachers, the time span of one year is not sufficient. It may be realistic to think in terms of two years or more.

Follow-Up Support

The inservice program does not end when the new programs are implemented. The steering committee must provide continuing support services for the staff. Special help should be provided for those having difficulties with the mechanics of new techniques. Rap sessions and problem-solving meetings should be called regularly to discuss problems, frustrations, and issues. These sessions should also provide opportunities to revise both inservice and program plans.

School visits are also an excellent resource for teachers wishing to acquire new skills. The schools selected for visits should be successfully practicing those concepts to be implemented. In some areas it may be difficult to find schools nearby that have good examples of middle level programs. In such cases other resources must be selected.

Evaluation of Staff Development Program

During the implementation phase, evaluative data must be gathered for both the new program and the inservice program. The data collected should be formative in nature and should provide feedback for immediate program modification.

Data should be gathered to determine the effect of the new program in relation to the student needs identified in Phase I. This would include information in the areas of intellectual achievement and social/emotional growth.

Evaluation data on the inservice program should reflect changes in teacher attitudes and classroom behavior. The data collected can then be compared to the identified teacher needs and objectives listed at the beginning of Phase II.

Evaluation is an integral part of each phase of the staff development program. Without a carefully conceived evaluative plan, it would be im-

possible to gain data necessary for program improvement or to determine progress.

Conclusion

If middle level schools are to establish programs that are appropriately responsive to the needs of adolescents, an ongoing staff development program is a necessary ingredient of the total effort of those schools.

With the implementation phase installed, the staff development program is fully operational. If a school wishes to remain a viable institution, the process must be continuous with all phases of the model in various stages of revision. Needs are being assessed, new curricular programs developed and implemented, new inservice programs established and implemented, and evaluations conducted. Middle level schools, because of the changing nature of their clientele, must be on an ever moving cycle of self-renewal.

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DECEMBER 1990

Restructuring Middle Schools

Strategies for Using *Turning Points*

By Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark

The 1980s have been a dynamic decade for middle level education. More and more teachers and administrators became cognizant of the special needs of early adolescents and began developing programs that were responsive to those needs. Professional organizations such as the National Middle School Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals expanded their services to middle level educators across the nation.

The writing and research of the decade examined the definition of middle level education, components of successful programs, the nature and implementation of developmentally responsive programs in America's middle level schools, the middle level school experiences of students, the middle level principalship, the characteristics of successful principals, and the status of middle level programs and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of early adolescents.

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Closing the decade was the publication of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents' report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989).

This report combines the best of middle level research and practice into a powerful document that emphasizes the vital importance of middle level schools, their current shortcomings, descriptions of exemplary practices, and recommendations for developing middle level schools into a powerful force in shaping the lives of young adolescents.

It seems entirely appropriate that the dynamic decade of the '80s would be culminated by middle level education's first major national foundation report focusing on the early adolescent.

Anthony Jackson (1990), project director of the Task Force, reports that the response to *Turning Points* by the education community all over the country "has been overwhelmingly positive." He goes on to say:

> Nevertheless, some educators have commented that there is very little that is new in the report. "We are already doing that" is a common response to many of the recommendations in *Turning Points* from schools across the nation.
>
> Despite such perceptions, recent studies show that few of the recommended actions, though frequently proposed, are actually practiced in schools (p. 1).

Jackson's comments are confirmed by numerous studies in the late 1980s. In spite of the evidence that many of the common elements identified by Alexander and George (1981), Clark and Valentine (1981), Lipsitz (1984), and the NASSP Council (1985) are successful in creating more developmentally appropriate environments for young adolescents (Lipsitz, 1984; George and Oldaker, 1985; and Mac Iver, 1990), these elements are not found in a majority of this country's middle level schools.

National studies conducted by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Cawelti, 1988), Alexander and McEwin (1989), and the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at Johns Hopkins University (Mac Iver, 1990) give evidence that most programs commonly recommended by middle level educators and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development are not being widely implemented.

Even more discouraging is the finding that even when schools report programs such as interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories, many of these programs are not functioning in the way they were intended to function (Mac Iver, 1990; Lounsbury and Clark, 1990).

The Importance of *Turning Points* for Middle Level School Restructuring

Turning Points is important to middle level educators in many ways.

First, the report confirms that many of the programs middle level educators have been trying to implement in their schools are developmentally appropriate to the needs of early adolescents. The report strongly supports the "creation of smaller focus groups," one of the components of successful middle schools described by Lipsitz (1984).

Turning Points also advocates programs such as teacher advisories and interdisciplinary teaming. These programs are "cornerstones" of successful middle level schools. The research of George and Oldaker (1985) and Mac Iver (1990) support the effectiveness of these programs when they are functioning in ways they were intended to function.

The report also confirms the need for a core curriculum, emphasis on student success—including the elimination of all tracking—and the importance of parental involvement. Again, these concepts are recognized and accepted by significant numbers of middle level educators and researchers.

Second, Jackson (1990) reports that *Turning Points* proposes several innovations, including:

- School or community youth service as part of the core curriculum for all middle grade students
- Health education taught in an interdisciplinary life sciences curriculum focused on adolescent development
- Teacher education programs that require apprenticeships in middle grade settings
- Extensive involvement of health and community organizations in educating young adolescents.

Third, *Turning Points* describes some of the shortcomings of middle level schools. Nowhere is this more clear than in the introduction of the report when the Task Force states:

> A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents. Caught in a vortex of changing demands, the engagement of many youth in learning diminishes, and their rates of alienation, substance abuse, absenteeism, and dropping out of school begin to rise (pp. 8, 9).

Fourth, the Task Force has provided educators with guidelines for establishing a purpose for middle level schools. Their study was guided by the following questions:

> What qualities do we envision in the 15-year-old who has been well-served in the middle years of schooling? What do we want every young adolescent to know, to feel, to be able to do upon emerging from that educational and school related experience?
>
> Our answer is embodied in five characteristics associated with being an effective human being. Our 15-year old will be:
>
> An intellectually reflective person;
>
> A person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work;
>
> A good citizen;
>
> A caring and ethical individual; and
>
> A healthy person.

By establishing this purpose, the Task Force has instituted a national purpose for middle level education.

Fifth, *Turning Points* gives middle level educators a challenge to continue their efforts in developing responsive middle level schools. Integrating current research with "considered and wise practice," the Task Force found that the transformation of education for early adolescents involved eight essential principles. These principles include:

1. Large middle grade schools are divided into small communities for learning.
2. Middle grade schools transmit a core of common knowledge to all students.
3. Middle grade schools are organized to ensure success for all students.
4. Teachers and principals have the major responsibility and power to transform middle grade schools.
5. Teachers for the middle grades are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.
6. Schools promote good health; the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked.
7. Families are allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and
8. Schools and communities are partners in educating young adolescents.

These principles, along with recommendations and suggestions for improvement of middle level schools, form the heart of *Turning Points*.

Finally, *Turning Points* recognizes the importance of middle level education. The report states: "For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future." The Task Force goes on to say, "Middle grade schools—junior high schools, intermediate schools, and middle schools—are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescence."

Turning Points gives middle level education new status as an equal partner in the educational hierarchy. The Carnegie Task Force provides the mission, the challenges, and the principles upon which middle level educators can

develop strong, viable, developmentally responsive middle level schools.

Your School and *Turning Points*: Some Considerations

Turning Points provides an excellent model for school assessment and restructuring. The overreaching question that teachers and administrators of every middle level school should ask is: How well does our school compare with the recommendations of the Task Force?

This question is best addressed by answering a series of questions based on each of the eight recommendations found in *Turning Points*.

Recommendation 1: Creating a Community for Learning

"Schools should be a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and intellectual development." The Task Forces suggests:

- Creating smaller learning environments
- Forming teachers and students into teams
- Assigning an adult adviser to each student.

The creation of smaller learning environments has been an important feature of successful middle level schools for more than a decade. Organizing schools into houses of 200 to 300 students is one of the strategies recommended by the Task Force.

"Schools-within-schools," according to the Task Force, "offer young adolescents a stable clustering of teachers and peers. The house creates the conditions for teams of teachers and students to coalesce, for the adviser and student to get to know each other, and for students to begin to form close associations with their peers."

The Task Force also advocates the use of teaming in middle level schools. They believe that "teaming provides an environment conducive to learning by reducing the stress of anonymity and isolation on students." Mac Iver (1990) also supports the effectiveness of teams in middle level schools. He states: "Our data (Center for Research in Elementary and Middle Schools [CREMS], Johns Hopkins) support the claim that a well-organized interdisciplinary team approach can strengthen a school's overall program for students in the middle grades." In summing up the CREMS data on interdisciplinary teaming Mac Iver reported:

> . . . interdisciplinary teams of teachers—if they have an appropriate leader, sufficient common planning time, and the willingness to use this planning time for team activities—were reported to produce a wide variety of benefits.

Turning Points also discusses the importance of "assigning an adult adviser to each student." Garvin (1987), in an article about parental expectations of middle level schools, supports this recommendation, saying that one of the most important things parents want is "that when my child is at school that he or she knows at least one adult well enough to go to if support is needed."

Many middle level schools have established teacher advisory programs to provide for student advocacy. In discussing the importance of teacher advisories, Mac Iver (1990) reported that "strong implementation yields benefits that are educationally significant—by helping a school better meet young adolescent social and emotional needs, a group advisory program can play an important role in dropout prevention."

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Is your school a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and intellectual development?
- ✓ What steps have you taken or could you take to create smaller learning environments?
- ✓ Do you currently have teaching teams in your school? If not, what steps must be taken to organize teams of teachers and students?
- ✓ Does every child in your school have at least one adult who will serve as an advocate and/or adviser?
- ✓ Do you currently have a teacher advisory program?

Recommendation 2: Teaching a Core of Common Knowledge

"Every student in the middle grades should learn to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society." The Task Force suggests:

- Teaching young adolescents to think critically
- Teaching young adolescents to develop healthful lifestyles
- Teaching young adolescents to be active citizens
- Integrating subject matter across disciplines
- Teaching students to learn as well as to test successfully.

The Carnegie Task Force believes that every middle level school should offer a core academic program and should expect every student to complete this program successfully. Defining this "core academic program" is a crucial task for middle level teachers, parents, and administrators. Care must be exercised so that the core curriculum identified represents a broad spectrum of developmentally appropriate experiences. Goodlad (1984) found that most middle level teachers, parents, and students want a balance of academic, social, personal, and vocational experiences in the middle level school.

The Task Force emphasizes the need for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. To

accomplish this, a core curriculum is recommended where students "confront themes, which are clusters of subjects, and learn to inquire, associate, and synthesize across subjects. . . . This approach clearly requires that current emphasis on coverage of a large quantity of information must yield to an emphasis on depth or quality of a student's understanding. Schools can choose the most important principles and concepts within each subject, and concentrate instruction there."

In establishing these principles and concepts, teachers will be required to play new roles in the classroom. Traditional classroom instruction supported by "long-held beliefs that the role of teachers is to transmit knowledge to students," must shift to strategies that actively engage students in learning. The Task Force believes that ". . . teachers must view themselves as facilitators through which young people construct knowledge themselves." Middle level administrators will need to assist teachers in making this transition.

In developing a common core of knowledge, the Task Force also strongly supports the integration of health education into the core instructional program as an element of the life sciences. Important work in this area has been done by Paul DeHart Hurd (1989) at Stanford University. Helping students learn about their bodies and the maturation processes they are going through as early adolescents is important to self-esteem development and the establishment of healthful lifestyles.

Emphasis should also be placed on assisting early adolescents in acquiring important life skills that will equip them to reject self-destructive or dangerous behavior.

> Young people need training in skills that help them to resist interpersonal or media messages to engage in specific negative behaviors, increase self-control and self-esteem, reduce stress and anxiety, gain in the ability to express apprehension and disapproval, and become assertive.

These skills must not only be a part of the health education/biology curriculum and the teacher advisory programs, but they should be an integral part of the instruction in all subject areas. The Task Force believes that essential life skills can be learned through systematic instruction and role playing. "Efforts to teach adolescents these skills have been important in preventing adolescent smoking and substance abuse . . . intervention based on life skill development has also been effective in preventing pregnancies in older adolescents" (*Turning Points*, 1989).

The common core of knowledge must also include opportunities for early adolescents to "learn values, skills, and a sense of social responsibility important for citizenship in the United States." Youth service as a requirement for all students provides a unique opportunity for middle level students to become significantly involved in their schools and communities.

Tutoring other students, serving as classroom or lab assistants, or becoming a part of school governance committees offers students the opportunity to become contributing members of the school community. Requiring students to become involved in community activities such as assisting with child care, helping the handicapped and elderly, getting involved in community food drives and community clean-up projects gives early adolescents opportunities to become concerned, caring, and contributing members of the local community.

Content in most middle level schools is fragmented into single subject compartments. Organizing content in this manner makes it difficult for students to see connections between ideas in the different disciplines. The Task Force advocates the integration of content around themes that early adolescents find relevant to their own lives.

In *Turning Points*, emphasis is placed on closer alignment with the real learning tasks of the middle level school.

While the idea of integration of subject matter is not new with *Turning Points*, it supports the thinking of many educators, e.g. Beane (1990) and Jacobs (1989).

Assessment of early adolescents must more clearly reflect the instruction and curricular practices recommended by the Task Force. In *Turning Points*, emphasis is placed on closer alignment with the real learning tasks of the middle level school. In doing this, the Task Force suggests that, "State and national achievement tests will also differ from current practice. One promising alternative is to assess student performance on the basis of work portfolios as well as of test scores."

The State of Arizona has recently taken steps to incorporate new assessment procedures in all grade levels in the state. The program, which will be phased in over several years, will still use achievement tests, but on a reduced basis. Supplementing the use of achievement tests will be assessments designed to measure thinking processes, decision making, and application of knowledge.

In addition, each school will be responsible for designing its own student assessment program which may include portfolios and other appropriate assessment devices.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Is every student in your school learning to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, leading a healthy life, behaving ethically and lawfully, and preparing to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society?
- ✓ Are early adolescents in your school learning to think critically? Are they given opportunities to become actively involved in problem-solving activities?
- ✓ Is there emphasis in the curriculum on the development of healthful lifestyles?
- ✓ Are there opportunities for early adolescents to learn life skills through participation in school and community service?
- ✓ Is subject matter being integrated across the various disciplines?
- ✓ Are students being assisted in acquiring the skills to be effective learners and testtakers?

Recommendation 3: Ensuring Success for All Students

"All young adolescents should have the opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the middle grades program, regardless of previous achievement or the pace at which they learn." The Task Force recommends:

- Grouping students for learning (no tracking)
- Scheduling classroom periods to maximize learning
- Expanding the structure of opportunity for learning.

While "the completion of the core instructional program" is important, the Task Force believes it "should not be the only criterion of a successful middle grade experience."

> Middle grade schools must strive to offer each student opportunities to exhibit excellence and to gain the confidence and personal satisfaction of becoming expert or very good at something. For many young people, mastering the core academic program will provide these opportunities. For others, opportunities to exhibit excellence may lie outside the core program in exploratory courses or athletics, or outside the schoolhouse through youth service or other community based activities.

The authors of *Turning Points* take a very strong stand against the practice of tracking or ability grouping. Grouping students by high and low ability groups (tracking) "has proven to be one of the most divisive and damaging school practices in existence." The Task Force states: "Once placed in lower tracks, students often do not move up. While lower track youth refine basic skills, students in higher tracks move to more advanced ones.

"The gap in achievement between 'low-ability' and 'high ability' students widens, and isolation between the two groups increases."

The harm caused to students by ability grouping is well-documented. Oakes (1985) discusses the problem of lower ability students being locked into dull, repetitive instructional programs primarily focused on basic competencies as compared to the exciting opportunities for learning, problem solving and critical thinking that may be afforded to students in the higher tracks.

In discussing the research on middle level schools conducted by the Center for Research in Elementary and Middle Schools, Braddock (1990) states:

> . . . homogeneous grouping practices may not reduce heterogeneity enough to provide better instruction, may incorrectly assign many students (if based on a single criterion), may result in racially or ethnically identifiable classes or tracks in desegregated schools, may stigmatize students and teachers in low groups, or may lead to the creation of academic elites. A heterogeneous mix of students, however, may offer important opportunities to all individuals in the class.

In spite of all the evidence against tracking and/or ability grouping, it appears to be commonly used in a vast number of middle level schools in America (Braddock, 1990; Lounsbury and Clark, 1990).

The National Association of Secondary School Principals' study of the eighth grade (Lounsbury and Clark, 1990) found that 89 percent of the schools in the study used grouping in some form. This pervasiveness of tracking and ability grouping led to the following statement:

> The evidence mounts—homogeneous grouping is of little or no value in increasing academic achievement and it has clearly deleterious effects socially and emotionally. Yet its use continues with little or no letup. Eighty-nine percent of the eighth grades in this study use some form of ability grouping. The full implementation of the middle school concept will require a drastic reduction in the amount and degree of tracking and homogeneous grouping. Labels and accompanying assumptions about inherent ability can have serious and long-lasting effects at this key developmental stage.

The Task Force encourages schools to establish strategies that are successful in teaching students with diverse abilities and learning rates. They suggest using two highly documented successful programs: cooperative learning and cross-age tutoring.

Greater flexibility of time for learning is another important factor in student success as identified by the Task Force. Current class schedules that allocate 40 to 50 minutes a day to each of six or seven courses are inappropriate to the needs of early adolescents.

The Task Force believes that "a key feature of the transformed middle grade schools should be flexibility in the duration of classes." The use of teacher teams who have the ability to change class schedules to best meet the needs and interests of their students is an excellent approach to achieving greater time flexibility.

"Expanding the structure of opportunity for learning" is another way that middle level schools can enhance the opportunities for all their students to be successful. Extended day programs that provide instruction for students before and after school have been successful in a number of schools. Summer school and other programs such as tutoring and mentoring by teachers have shown considerable success.

Opportunities to participate in a variety of activities offer numerous avenues for students to achieve success and receive recognition. Youth service programs in the school and community also offer students numerous opportunities to achieve success and a feeling of self-worth.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Do all young adolescents in your school have the opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the program, regardless of previous achievement or the pace at which they learn?
- ✓ Do you group students for instruction? If so, have you examined the consequences of grouping practices on adolescent learners? Have you examined ways in which instruction can be improved by the removal of all tracking practices?
- ✓ Is your school using a flexible schedule?
- ✓ Are there opportunities for students to learn at times other than the regularly scheduled class periods (i.e., before school, after school, lunch)?
- ✓ Are there opportunities for students to participate in a variety of school and community activities where they can experience success, self-worth, and recognition?

Recommendation 4: Empowering Teachers and Administrators

"Decisions concerning the experiences of middle grade students should be made by the adults who know them best." The Task Force recommends:

- Giving teachers greater influence in the classroom
- Establishing building governance committees
- Designating leaders for the teaching process.

The Task Force believes that "Teachers must have greater authority to make decisions, and responsibility for the consequences of those decisions, regarding the day-to-day educational experiences of their students." They go on to say: "Dramatically improved outcomes for young adolescents require individualized, responsive, and creative approaches to teaching that will occur only when teachers are able to use their intimate knowledge of students to design instructional programs."

Teachers organized into teams offer the best opportunities for teachers to gain greater authority in the decision-making process concerning goals and objectives, content selection, time use, instructional strategies, resources, and student evaluation. Research suggests that these are common tasks in which teaching teams are regularly engaged (George and Oldaker, 1985; Clark and Clark, 1987; and George and Stevenson, 1989).

Involving teachers in school governance is another important element in successful middle level schools. The Carnegie Task Force recommends that this take place through the establishment of a school governance committee. Composed of teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, students, and key representatives from the community, this committee would meet regularly and serve in an advisory capacity to the principal.

When middle level schools restructure their program around schools-within-schools and/or teaching teams, new leadership roles emerge. Typically, each house or team would have a teacher leader who would be responsible for coordinating the activities of his or her house or team. Mac Iver (1990) reports the importance of strategies for leadership in the effective functioning of interdisciplinary teams.

> Our data clearly show that having a formal team leader (whether elected, appointed, or rotating) is better than having no leader at all. Teams with a formal leader spend significantly more of their common planning time on team activities. Similarly, principals report more frequent benefits from interdisciplinary teams in schools where there are formally designated leaders.

Sharing leadership with teachers also has a strong impact on school morale, commitment to change, and teachers' sense of efficacy.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Are the decisions concerning the experiences of your students being made by the teachers and administrators in your school?
- ✓ Are teachers given greater responsibility on what should be taught and how it should be taught?
- ✓ Do teachers and administrators participate regularly in the governance of the school?
- ✓ Are teachers given opportunities to assume leadership positions with regard to teaching and learning?

Recommendation 5: Preparing Teachers for the Middle Grades

"Teachers in middle grade schools should be selected and specially educated to teach young adolescents." The Task Force recommends:

- Developing expert teachers of young adolescents.

The Task Force believes that "Many teachers of young adolescents dislike their work." They go on to say:

> Assignment to a middle grade school is, all too frequently, the last choice of teachers who are prepared for elementary and secondary education. Teachers view duty in the middle grades as a way station. After suffering through a few years with young adolescents, teachers

move on to assignments they prefer and for which they were prepared in their own education.

In addition to teachers who are waiting for transfers to what they consider more desirable placements, many more teachers are ill-prepared to deal with the special needs of early adolescents. Few states require special certification or endorsements for middle level teaching, and as a result, few universities and colleges have middle level preparation programs.

In *Turning Points*, the Task Force states that "Dramatic changes are needed in both what individuals learn to become middle grade teachers and how they learn it." They believe that middle level teachers must understand early adolescent development, learn how to work in teams, and understand the principles of guidance.

To learn the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful middle level teachers, the Task Force supports programs in which undergraduates concentrate in one "and preferably in two academic subjects such as English, history, mathematics, and biology."

Observation and field work experiences should begin as early as the freshman year and extensive internships under the guidance of mentor teachers should be available to all prospective middle level teachers. Also recommended are full-time paid apprenticeships done in conjunction with graduate work.

Special middle level endorsement and certification is recommended by the Task Force as an "opportunity to increase the numbers and strengthen the quality of middle grade teachers." They go on to say:

> The middle grade endorsement is valuable for three reasons. First, it would recognize the special talents and training of a teacher who has decided to teach young adolescents. Second, it would encourage schools of education to offer specialized courses for the middle grades. Third, it would provide a fully legitimate status for middle grade teachers, something many do not have at this time; prospective teachers are unlikely to prepare for a career for which there is no recognition to practice.

Middle level principals must consider the issue of preparing middle level teachers from several points of view.

Middle level principals must consider the issue of preparing middle level teachers from several points of view.

First, there is an immediate need to improve the skills of teachers in their schools. This must be done through extensive staff development programs.

Second, principals and school districts must develop procedures to ensure that all new teachers hired into middle level schools have some minimal training and a desire to work with early adolescents.

Third, principals must apply pressure through their local and state administrator groups to state departments of education to develop and require middle level certification and/or endorsement. Pressure must also be applied on state universities and colleges to provide initial middle level teacher education programs and graduate courses that lead to specialized degrees in middle level education and that meet state requirements for certification and/or endorsement.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Are teachers in your school specially prepared to teach early adolescents?
- ✓ Are teachers in your school required to have middle level certification? If not, do you have special criteria for selecting and hiring teachers who have received special preparation for teaching in middle level schools?
- ✓ Do you make provisions to provide regular staff development for all persons in your school?
- ✓ Are you and your professional groups working to encourage universities to provide programs for the preparation of middle level teachers and administrators?
- ✓ Are you and your professional groups working to encourage your state department of education to require middle level certification and/or endorsement of all teachers who teach in the middle level?

Recommendation 6: Improving Academic Performance Through Better Health and Fitness

"Young adolescents must be healthy to learn." The Task Force recommends:

- Ensuring student access to health services
- Establishing the school as a health-promoting environment.

In *Turning Points*, the Task Force states, "physical and mental health dimensions of educating the young adolescent, dimensions so vital to the ancient Greeks, are largely lost on us Americans." The Task Force goes on to say:

> Many schools count on the school nurse to bring some health care to their students but with the exception of athletes, many students do not receive the health services they need. In the view of 70 percent of all U. S. teachers, poor health and undernourishment are problems for their students.

Health problems of early adolescents have major implications for learning. Students who are in ill health are often inattentive and disengaged from the learning process. Excessive absences also interfere with the learning process; once students fall behind it is often difficult to catch up. Increased drug and alcohol use by early adolescents also affects students' ability to learn and function responsibly.

The Task Force believes that while "school systems are not responsible for

meeting every health need of their students," they must accept the challenge of assisting students with health needs when those needs interfere with the learning process. Believing that there is a "direct link between the health of young adolescents and their success in school," the Task Force concludes:

> Middle grade schools must accept a significant responsibility, and be provided sufficient resources, to ensure that needed health services are accessible to young adolescents and that schools become health promoting environments.

In providing early adolescents with the necessary health services, the authors of *Turning Points* recommend the use of health coordinators whose principal task is to "marshal! available health care resources in behalf of their students." These coordinators would provide minimal screening, make referrals, and maintain a list of health services within the community.

The report also recommends that middle level schools consider establishing "school-based" or "school-linked" community health clinics. Such clinics would make services convenient to early adolescents and would facilitate better follow-up care.

"Establishing the school as a health promoting environment," is another recommendation of the Task Force. They believe that middle level schools "should provide a model for healthful lifestyles for both students and adults." In addition to giving students information on good nutrition and diet, the school should restrict "junk foods" available for purchase on campus. Student fund-raising activities should also reflect the school's philosophy of good nutrition and dietary practices.

Schools should be smoke-free. Several Arizona school districts have recently banned smoking on all their campuses. Policies such as these send strong messages to both early adolescents and adults. Good health practices also extend to the area of physical fitness. The Task Force states: "Physical fitness should be a matter of pride for all in the school community, including teachers, staff, and all students. Regular physical education and involvement in sports and fitness activities should be available for students and staff."

A middle level school promoting a healthy environment should be both emotionally and physically safe. Trusting and supportive relationships must develop among students and adults in the school. Schools must cooperate closely with community agencies in dealing with the problems of violence, weapons on campus, gangs, and drug dealing. These are problems that are larger than the school; and [illegible]e level administrators, teachers, students, and parents have every right to expect community involvement in solving these difficult problems.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Does your school provide a climate that promotes healthy lifestyles for faculty and students?
- ✓ Are all students given access to health services when needed?
- ✓ Is your school a model for healthy behavior? Are good health practices promoted and modeled by faculty and staff?
- ✓ Is your school emotionally and physically safe for both students and adults?

Recommendation 7: Reengaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents

"Families and middle grade schools must be allied through trust and respect if young adolescents are to succeed in school." The Task Force recommends:

- Offering parents meaningful roles in school governance
- Keeping parents informed
- Offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school.

As students move from elementary to middle level schools, the degree of parent participation declines markedly. The Task Force believes that this "widening gulf between families and schools during the middle grade years reflects many parents' belief that they should increasingly disengage from their young adolescents." They go on to say: "In the belief that adolescents should be independent, parents come to view involvement in their child's education as unnecessary. While young adolescents need greater autonomy, however, they neither need nor desire a complete break with parents and other family members."

Parents, for a variety of reasons, feel apprehensive about becoming involved in their child's school. Some parents remember negative feelings from their own middle level school experiences, while others feel unwelcome at their child's school. The Task Force believes that ". . . many middle grade schools do not encourage, and some actively discourage, parent involvement." They express concern that "Particularly in low-income and minority neighborhoods, parents are often considered to be part of the problem of educating young adolescents rather than an important potential educational resource."

Because of the documented benefits of parental involvement on students' achievement and attitudes toward school, the Task Force concludes that middle level schools must become more active in "closing the gulf between parents and school staff." The building of mutual trust and respect between families and middle level schools is crucial for the successful education of young adolescents.

The authors of *Turning Points* believe that a crucial step in getting parents involved in schools is to offer them "meaningful roles in school governance." Governance committees of teachers, administrators, and parents provide the opportunity to define the

mission, goals, and purposes of the school. Through decision making, school programs can be established that have the support of both parents and middle level educators.

Communication with parents is another important factor in student success.

Participation usually leads to a strong commitment by all groups to work together for mutual goals. Lipsitz (1984) reports that in the four successful schools she studied, parent participation through the advisory councils, volunteering, attendance at school functions, and other signs of unity with the schools' purposes, bolsters staff morale and appears to help some students identify with the purposes of schooling.

Communication with parents is another important factor in student success. The Task Force believes that direct communication is one of the most effective ways of establishing trust. Direct communication can ease the apprehensions parents have during the transition between elementary and middle level schools, and it can help parents understand school procedures and programs.

Lipsitz reports that "parents are generally very apprehensive about the middle years of schooling" and that in the four successful schools she studied ". . . parent advisory councils are extremely active in communicating parental anxiety to the schools and in informing parents about school practices." She goes on to say:

> The schools' administrators also stress constant openness with parents, both in the building and on the telephone. They all offer classes for parents on early adolescent development, aspects of peer relationships, and school life. This service, about which many parents are openly appreciative, binds them with loyalty to the school while helping them understand family interactions and school practices they may have otherwise questioned.

Schools can communicate with parents in many ways. Successful practices include regular contacts by the student's teacher adviser, back-to-school nights and other school functions, and parent-teacher conferences. The crucial factor is that there must be "consistent positive contact among families, teachers, and advisers" if a "climate of trust between the primary adult influencers on young people's development" is going to be created and maintained (*Turning Points*, 1989).

The learning process, in turn, can be supported by families in a variety of ways. Participation by parents in school activities sends a strong message to early adolescents about their parents' attitudes toward the importance of school. Dornbusch (1986), in a study of factors leading to success of high school students, found a correlation between parents' attendance at school functions and higher grades.

In addition to attendance at school meetings, parents can get involved in other activities such as tutoring, working in the library, serving as teacher assistants, and sponsoring student activities. In Arizona middle level schools (Clark and Clark, 1990), 82 percent of the principals reported parental involvement in school activities.

While participating at school is important, middle level teachers and administrators also need to encourage parents to become actively involved in assisting their children at home. The Task Force believes that teachers should design "home-learning activities that draw on parents' strengths" and that "parents can tutor their young adolescents or monitor completion of homework." They go on to say, "Most importantly, they can encourage their children to apply themselves diligently to their schoolwork, maintain good health, and engage in school service. High expectations can be strongly reinforced at home."

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Are families and faculty members in your school allied through trust and respect in efforts to ensure that all young adolescents will succeed?
- ✓ Do you regularly involve parents in meaningful roles in the governance of the school?
- ✓ Does your school work actively to inform parents of the progress of their children?
- ✓ Does your school actively engage parents' help in the learning process? Are opportunities given for parents to work in the classroom as tutors? Are parents given assistance in how to help their children learn at home?

Recommendation 8: Connecting Schools with Communities

"School and community organizations should share responsibility for each middle grade student's success." The Task Force suggests:

- Placing students in youth service
- Ensuring student access to health and social services
- Supporting the middle grade education program
- Augmenting resources for teachers and students
- Expanding career guidance for students.

Involving parents in school governance, parent workshops, and other school activities as discussed in Recommendation 7 is an important first step toward building community support. Lipsitz (1984) reports that "parents who participate in the school activities help set a tone that fosters school support in the community." The Carnegie Task Force states:

> A community that sets out to educate all of its young adolescents to become

> competent, responsible, and productive adults must marshal its resources behind its schools. In communities with ample or restricted school budgets, resources from the nonprofit and private sectors, health care professions, and other institutions can add intangible and invaluable dimensions to the educational process.

It is the responsibility of middle schools to aggressively seek out community support and build strong partnerships with community organizations and businesses. These partnerships, while they may be difficult to create, will bring numerous benefits to early adolescents and will involve the entire community in the efforts to develop stronger middle level education programs.

Youth service plays an important part in the involvement of the community in the education of early adolescents. As a core requirement, youth service places students in the community where opportunities are available to integrate school and community experiences. Youth service has long been an integral part of several national youth organizations and has been advocated by Boyer (1983) as a requirement for high school graduation.

The significance placed on healthy living in Recommendation 6 of *Turning Points* is again emphasized as an important component of "Connecting Schools with Communities." The Task Force states:

> Nearly every community has a health department, a family planning clinic, or counseling agency. Yet to be truly accessible to young adolescents, such services must be well-publicized, affordable, easy to reach, open at appropriate times, and attuned to the needs of adolescents themselves, and they must guarantee confidentiality.

These agencies support the services of the school and enlarge the possibility of services available to middle level students. Many schools have successfully worked out partnerships with community agencies that include social and counseling services and food and clothing banks. Much remains to be done to make all these services truly accessible.

In addition to working with community agencies, service clubs, and professional groups, middle level administrators must actively seek out ways of "augmenting resources for teachers and students." The Task Force suggests that "American business supports community educational and human services, and recent experience suggests that this support is expanding." They go on to say: "Business has both an important and civic duty to support public education and good business reasons to do so."

The support from business and the professions comes in a variety of ways: contributions to service agencies that provide services to students and their parents; partnerships with school systems with contributions of funds, equipment, and expertise; and contributions of certificates for prizes and services to be used as incentives for academic achievement, good attendance, citizenship, and other student goals.

Career guidance programs are needed in middle level schools, and the Carnegie Task Force believes that the community can be an excellent resource to augment current school programs. They suggest that "recent surveys indicate that young people desire more information about career planning and that school counselors are responsible for far too many students to provide individualized career counseling."

Several ideas for supporting school counseling services from community resources are provided. These include: agencies such as 4-H, Future Farmers and Future Homemakers of America, Junior Achievement and programs such as the Boy Scouts' Career Explorers; professional associations such as the Business and Professional Women's Association, which sponsors a 10-state career development program that links business and professional women with teenage girls; and business-career development initiatives that link young adolescents with adult employees in the workplace.

Early adolescents are making important choices during their middle level school years. It is vital that they receive accurate information about the infinite number of choices available to them. This can best be done by cooperative efforts between middle level schools and community agencies and businesses.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ Are community organizations working with you to share the responsibility for each early adolescent's success?
- ✓ Are all students required to participate in a service project?
- ✓ Does your school serve as a resource or "clearinghouse" for special community services needed by students?
- ✓ Does your school work cooperatively with other community agencies to promote middle level education?
- ✓ Do you actively solicit support from community businesses, service clubs, and foundations in the provision of resources for students and teachers?
- ✓ Is your school providing opportunities for early adolescents to receive career guidance?

Final Suggestions

This newsletter has focused on using *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* as a guide for middle level restructuring. The report, which examines current middle level school practices, is important because it supports many current developmentally responsive programs, suggests some new innovations, provides a national purpose, establishes eight essential principles to guide the education of young adolescents, and recognizes the status of middle level education as an equal partner in the educational hierarchy.

In addition to a discussion of the importance of the work of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, we focused on the eight major recommendations and other research and literature that support those recommendations. At the conclusion of the discussion of each of the recommendations, we provided questions suitable for use by principals as a basis for school self-study.

While *Turning Points* provides a wealth of information and specific guidance toward the restructuring of middle level schools, the key to the successful implementation of the eight recommendations lies within the principal and his or her ability and skill to provide visionary leadership. We offer a few final suggestions:

1. Be an expert on Turning Points *and the literature and research that supports the eight recommendations.* Enlightened leadership is built on a base of knowledge. Understand the report and recommendations and know the research and literature. (A supplementary bibliography of books and articles supporting the recommendations is included. Each listing is followed by a number in parentheses which indicates the number of the *Turning Points* recommendation.)

2. Be a visionary leader and take a stand for what you believe to be in the best interests of the early adolescents in your school. Using your knowledge, experience, and *Turning Points* as a guideline, reexamine your goals and commitment to creating a developmentally responsive middle level school. Create your vision for your school and communicate that vision to others. Exhibit your passion for appropriate middle level education and demonstrate a sense of urgency for school improvement.

3. Be an effective communicator. Take every opportunity to talk to teachers, parents, and community members about *Turning Points*. Distribute information (copies of the *Executive Study* are available from the Carnegie Foundation) and inform parents where your school stands in terms of the implementation of Task Force recommendations. Speak to community groups about the report and your school.

4. Be a leader of a community of learners. Visionary leadership requires that leaders model the values of the institution. Creating a community of learners is an important concept in implementing the Task Force recommendations. Using the suggested questions in the article, create study groups of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members to learn about their school and how it matches up to the recommendations of *Turning Points*.

5. Be a promoter. Promote the Carnegie report recommendations and your school's vision for accomplishing them. Enlist support from parents, community members, and local businesses in meeting school and community goals. Be a hustler. Go after what is best for your students.

6. Be a long-range planner. Recognize that change takes time and must involve teachers, parents, students, and community members to be successful. Establish a systematic plan that facilitates broad-based involvement in the examination of needs, establishment of purposes, consideration of alternatives, and development of new programs and/or revision of current programs. Encourage, motivate, monitor, and expedite the planning and implementation process.

Turning Points presents a rationale and a comprehensive set of recommendations for responsive middle levels' schools. It is, however, a well-informed, visionary principal engaging teachers, students, parents, and community members in school restructuring who can make the Carnegie recommendations a reality.

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3. Ensuring success for all students
4. Empowering teachers and administrators
5. Preparing teachers for the middle grades
6. Improving academic performance through better health and fitness
7. Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents
8. Connecting schools with communities

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Creating Responsive Middle Level Schools:

B

Leadership

Visionary leadership is a vital component in the process of restructuring middle level schools. This fact is confirmed by Robert Shockley, Larry Holt, and Yvonne Meichtry, who assert that principals must strongly believe in the purposes and goals of successful middle schools, have a vision, and clearly articulate those purposes to others.

In *Leadership in the Middle School: An Imperative for Excellence*, they state that "the effective middle level administrator must reinforce the values and belief systems of the school through continual symbolic actions—a type of modeling behavior called purposing." They believe that effective leaders focus on key issues and that they have a clear vision of their schools in terms of where they are, where they want the school to go, and how they are going to get there. Effective principals also clearly understand their leadership role in making their "visions" a reality.

The School Culture

Shockley, Holt, and Meichtry, like Johnston (*Four Climates in Effective Middle Level Schools*), stress the importance of school culture. They contend that successful schools are those whose cultures align with a vision of excellence in schooling and are built and nurtured by school leadership.

Building new middle level school cultural norms requires that administrators provide teachers with the opportunity to find meaning in their work, have some reasonable control over their work activities, and experience success. Principals must take on the role of cultural leaders and define, strengthen, and articulate the values and beliefs that give the middle level school its unique identity.

The authors conclude by calling for the clear articulation of middle level school purposes. They state "strong school leadership goes beyond school management and human relations responsibilities to a common vision and purpose that focuses on the needs of the young adolescent."

Communicating Our Purpose

Harry B. Williams, in *Middle Level Principals Should Explain What They Are Doing*, expands on the ideas of Shockley, Holt, and Meichtry, and suggests that the purposes and values of middle level education must be better articulated to the public.

He asks, "As educators we firmly believe that middle level adolescents' characteristics, needs, and developmental tasks are different, and the curriculum, instructional, and institutional arrangement should be designed and provided to

meet those needs, but how well do we explain and defend them to the general public?"

In designing a sound public relations program, Williams believes that schools can be helped:

1. To sense and analyze public concerns about the schools
2. To select and formulate messages that will meet public needs and desires for information
3. To find, select, and use the channels of communication that will most effectively deliver the messages to the community as a whole and to the various publics within it
4. To evaluate the results of communication and activities in relation to the goals set forth in the public relations plans of the district and of the individual school.

Williams concludes his article by offering a brief plan of action that will accomplish these four points.

The Effective Leader

In *School Restructuring: A Leadership Challenge for Middle Level Administrators*, Sally Clark and Donald Clark contend that the continued restructuring of middle level schools is making major leadership demands on administrators and that the careful examination of leadership characteristics, knowledges, and skills is crucial to effective middle level leadership.

Clark and Clark believe, as do Shockley, Holt, and Meichtry, that school restructuring requires that administrators be visionary, that they change current mind sets, and that they let go of old ways of doing things.

They agree that effective leaders possess the hard-won ability to get the right things done at the right time, they build on strengths, focus on positive opportunities, and view problems as challenges. Clark and Clark identify six important characteristics for leaders who wish to bring about successful restructuring:

1. A passion for middle level education
2. Willingness to share decision making
3. Concern for the well-being of all persons in the school
4. Opportunity orientation
5. A good self-concept
6. Model of school norms.

Successful middle level leadership also requires a comprehensive knowledge base. Clark and Clark suggest that for middle level administrators to be effective decision makers they must be knowledgeable in the following areas:

1. Early adolescent characteristics and behavior
2. Successful middle level programs
3. School strengths and weaknesses
4. Parent and community expectations
5. Change process.

In describing the leadership skills necessary for middle level restructuring, Clark and Clark draw from the work of Sergiovanni, who describes five leadership forces. Modifying the terms slightly, the Clarks advocate that administrators develop and/or improve their skills in the areas of:

1. School management (technical)
2. Human relations and communications (human)
3. Curriculum and instructional management (educational)
4. Modeling and "purposing" (symbolic)
5. Creating school cultures (cultural).

Sergiovanni believes that the first three forces or skills, when brought together, form the critical mass needed for competent schooling. These three factors are not enough, however, to provide for excellent schools. Excellent schools are characterized by two other leadership qualities: symbolic and cultural.

The article concludes with Clark and Clark offering 10 suggestions for facilitating the middle level school restructuring process. The challenge of restructuring is to not only live through the change process, but to build on the past to create a productive future.

In closing, they suggest that administrators of successful middle level schools are continuously engaged in school restructuring. These principals have a vision of what a responsive middle level school should be, a vision based on a solid knowledge base.

Because of this vision and the characteristics, knowledge, and skills they possess, they are able to convey their vision and involve others in the school restructuring process.

Successful middle level schools do not just happen—they are a result of intelligent leadership and effort.

JUNE 1985

Leadership in the Middle Level School: An Imperative for Excellence

Robert Shockley

Larry Holt

Yvonne Meichtry

While much of the research about the principal's role in school effectiveness focuses on the elementary and high school level, the principal plays no less of an important role in the middle level school.

Middle level education has historically suffered an identity crisis. The traditional elementary/secondary emphasis on certification, school accreditation, and teacher education affects school policies, laws, regulations, and funding, and ensures that many middle level schools are "caught in the middle" with little assistance in establishing a sense of purpose and goals separate from the elementary or high school.

A Sense of Mission

Joan Lipsitz (1981), in her research on effective middle level schools, concluded that schools that meet the academic and developmental needs of early adolescents have a clear sense of purpose and a strong belief system and see their role as separate from that of elementary or high schools. This mission becomes the focus of the organization and everyone involved in the organization works toward its goals.

This mission is also supported by a common belief system and shared understanding about the role and function of the institution (Manasse, 1984).

Robert Shockley and Larry Holt are professors of education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. Yvonne Meichtry is a graduate assistant on leave of absence from River Valley Junior High School, Spring Green, Wis., where she is an eighth grade science teacher.

The effective middle level administrator must reinforce the values and belief systems of the school through continual symbolic actions—a type of modeling behavior called "purposing." This continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leadership clarifies and encourages consensus and commitment to the organization's basic purposes (Vaill, 1982) and communicates to the staff the administrator's vision of "where the school should be going."

Effective leaders focus on key issues and put in extraordinary amounts of time to achieve those purposes. They have a clear vision of their school in terms of where they want the school to go and how they are going to get there. Also, they clearly understand their leadership role in making that vision a reality.

Once they have developed agendas and generated staff commitment, effective leaders face the task of implementing their vision through their leadership.

> Leaders must be able to recognize individuals whose abilities complement their own and who qualify as leadership substitutes.

Leadership styles vary from one situation to the next, but knowledge of one's own personal style, strengths, and weaknesses is essential (Manasse, 1984).

Leaders must be able to recognize individuals whose abilities complement their own and who qualify as leadership substitutes. When substitutes have been designated, organizational leaders may invest their time and personal resources elsewhere.

In addition to a vision of their school and their role in that school, effective leaders need a vision of change.

> Middle level administrators must actively articulate school mission, educational needs, and the welfare of young adolescent learners.

Through the efforts of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the NASSP Middle Level Council, the National Middle School Association, and other committed institutions and organizations, many changes are occurring in middle level education: interdisciplinary teaming and adviser-advisee programs, specialized curriculum planning, exploratory education and self-concept enhancement, strong guidance programs, and assessment of proper building utilization, for example. Middle level administrators must recognize the leadership skills this vision of change will require.

Effective middle level principals must not be satisfied to keep a low profile and maintain the status quo. Effective change requires administrators who can maintain a fair measure of building level autonomy, use information sensing skills, set appropriate agendas, and develop strategies for the particular schools (Manasse, 1984). The school administrator must strongly believe in the purposes and goals of the middle level school and have a vision of the needs that the school should be addressing.

Culture Building

A school's values, symbols, and beliefs are the cultural ingredients that govern what is valuable to the school. Parents', students', and teachers' understanding and acceptance of these values enables a school to move toward the ideals that it holds and accomplish the objectives that it has established.

All schools have cultures, strong or weak, functional or dysfunctional. Those schools that have cultures aligned with a vision of excellence in schooling, that are built and nurtured by school leadership, are the successful schools.

Leadership responsibilities require that people move in a common direction, that norms are provided that define what people should accomplish and how, and that individuals be provided with a source of meaning and significance (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Refining norms at the middle school level is especially important, since norms for this school level have traditionally been synonymous with elementary and/or secondary level norms. For the middle level teacher to derive a sense of purpose and significance, he or she must recognize the factors that separate his or her role from the roles of the elementary or secondary level teacher.

Middle level administrators who are able to provide a tightly structured value system in their school will enhance the motivation, commitment, enthusiasm, and loyalty of teachers. Teachers must have the opportunity to find meaning in their work, have some reasonable control over their work activities, and experience success. Receiving recognition for their success makes teachers more willing to make a significant investment of time, talent, and energy. Culture building requires the school leader to supply teachers with meaningful answers to such questions as: What is school about? What is important? How are we unique? How do I fit into the scheme of things?

> The school administrator must strongly believe in the purposes and goals of the middle level school and have a vision of the needs that the schools should be addressing.

The effective middle level administrator consequently takes on the role of cultural leader, whereby he or she defines, strengthens, and articulates the values and beliefs that give the middle level school its unique identity (Sergiovanni, 1984). The net effect of this leadership is a bonding of teachers, students, and others committed to the mission and beliefs of the school. Their work and their lives take on new importance with richer meaning and an expanded sense of identity because they have a feeling of belonging to something special (Sergiovanni, 1984).

This concept of culture building is not a new idea in terms of leadership. In 1957, Philip Selznick stated:

> The art of the creative leader is the art of institution building, the reworking of human and technological materials to fashion an organism that embodies new and enduring values .... To institutionalize is to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. The prizing of social machinery beyond its technical role is largely a reflection of the unique way it fulfills personal or group needs. Whenever individuals become attached to an organization or a way of doing things as persons rather than as technicians, the result is a prizing of the device for its own sake. From the standpoint of the committed person, the organization is changed from an expandable tool into a valued source of personal satisfaction .... The institutional leader, then, is primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values.[1]

This type of leadership is imperative if middle level schools are to create and maintain educational programs that are responsive to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents. An identity and sense of purpose separate from the elementary and high school programs must be a driving force that both the school staff and the community recognize.

Instructional Leadership

If principals are to be effective instructional leaders, they must have a clear sense of mission and control, test the limits in providing needed resources, be persuasive and committed to high standards, use a participatory style, and be incontent to maintain the status quo.

Instructional leadership requires the administrator to utilize educational expertise to diagnose educational problems and provide appropriate staff development, supervision, and support. These are responsibilities that can be shared by people both inside and outside the school, while the principal assumes the role of innovator. He or she must initiate, encourage, and facilitate instructional improvement (De Bevoise, 1984).

For too long, principal certification and training programs have emphasized management and human relations competencies at the expense of educational and other leadership skills. While these leadership skills are becoming increasingly important in *all* of our schools, they are desperately needed in schools at the middle level.

Effective Administration

Principals who identify the purpose of events and activities that occur during the schools' daily routine can provide students, teachers, and community members with a sense of the schools' importance and purpose. These administrators communicate the significance of what their group is doing and indeed "could" be doing, and articulate this sense of purpose to school staff and community members with a sense of excitement, originality, and freshness, that stimulates commitment from them (De Bevoise, 1984).

> A school's values, symbols, and beliefs are the cultural ingredients that govern what is valuable to the school.

Middle level administrators must actively articulate school mission, educational needs, and the welfare of young adolescent learners.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1980), in studies of effective administrators, cite the following traits:

- A propensity for clear goals and to have these goals serve as a continuous source of motivation.
- A high degree of self-confidence and openness to others.
- A tolerance for ambiguity.
- A tendency to test limits of interpersonal and organizational systems.
- A sensitivity to the dynamics of power.
- An analytical perspective.
- The ability to be in charge of their jobs.

A significant feature of the study indicated that the effective principal is not afraid to "rock the boat" or to change the status quo if advocating change is in the best interest of the school.

Conclusion

If our middle level schools are to swim against a tide of confusion that is surfacing in the middle grades, they must clearly articulate their educational purposes. Research has shown that schools can meet the challenge of excellence by addressing the academic and unique developmental needs of their students.

Strong school leadership goes beyond school management and human relations responsibilities to a common vision and purpose that focuses on the needs of the young adolescent. Without this leadership our middle level schools will be susceptible to the traditional forces in our society and profession that would make the school in the middle a miniature high school or an elaborate elementary school, ill-defined and inappropriate to the developmental and academic needs of this age group.

[1] Philip Selznick, *Leadership and Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

Middle Level Schools in the U.S.

Grade Levels	Number, 1983	Number, 1984	1983 to 1984
7-8-9	3,340	3,172	−168
7-8	2,550	2,776	+226
6-7-8	3,144	3,802	+658
5-6-7-8	944	1,005	+ 61
Other	1,428	940	−488
Total	11,406	11,695	+289

Source: The U.S. Department of Education Statistical Information Office.

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FEBRUARY 1986

Middle Level Principals Should Explain What They Are Doing

By Harry B. Williams

The students were reported to be unruly, teacher morale low, and the place a mess. But I was asked to visit a middle level school so I went to see what I could see, and perhaps to make some suggestions.

I went at the wrong time. That week students were involved in mini-courses. I saw the typical range of young people, from those who looked like they should still be in the third grade to brutes who looked like they should be on the varsity football team. One group was tie-dying, another was hacking heroically at the hard, red Georgia clay, on the way to making a vegetable garden. In another room, lovely sylphs in leotards, along with a few skinny boys in cut-offs, were totally absorbed in rhythmic dancing.

And so it went. There was only one sour note—three or four students in one room were making up classwork under the supervision of a teacher who obviously would have preferred being in on the mini-course action.

How would the teachers or principal of that school have explained what they were doing that day to the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education who were so oriented to time-on-academic-task? How would they answer extremists who would say that there was no discipline or learning in that school; that time was wasted; that the school was lax, permissive, and humanistic?

Harry B. Williams is associate professor of sociology and education at The University of Georgia, Athens.

American educators have come a long way in concept—and some lesser distance in practice—in taking a stand on three propositions:

1. Middle-level adolescents' characteristics, needs, and developmental tasks are different from those of students in the earlier and later years of schooling.

2. An abrupt transition from the self-contained classroom (and often the parent surrogate) of the earlier school years to the highly structured and differentiated program of the later years is difficult for many students.

3. Therefore, curriculum, instructional, and institutional arrangements should be designed and provided to meet these needs and to make this transition a smooth one in which learning continues.

Many American educators firmly believe these propositions, which are supported by many of their colleagues in psychology, sociology, and medicine. But how do they explain, defend, and sustain them to members of the public who see education as nothing but students sitting in rows with their feet squarely on the floor, doing nothing except listening to a teacher talk all day, every day—preferably with a hickory switch in plain sight?

Educators have options:

- Give up, abandon the whole concept, and put students back in rows to be lectured and drilled for a sequence of 50- or 55-minute periods all day, every day
- Simulate and dissimulate, trying to persuade such people that you are doing what they want, while in fact you are doing what you think is right for middle-level students; or try to let people know as little as possible

about what is going on in school

- Try to explain as clearly as possible what you are trying to do and the good reasons you are trying to do it.[1]

The first option would mean abandoning professional responsibility and integrity, letting down the young people of America. The second option will not work because, to paraphrase a James Thurber fable, "It is not so easy to fool the public nowadays as it used to be."[2]

> But how do they explain, defend, and sustain them to members of the public who see education as nothing but students sitting in rows with their feet squarely on the floor, doing nothing except listening to a teacher talk all day, every day—preferably with a hickory switch in plain sight?

This leaves the third option: communicate as effectively as possible. Effective communication is accurate, adequate, clear, and timely.

The following is an example of what not to say:

> The curriculum for the middle grades in Sweetwater School District will include many flexible contingencies and negate any nonconforming tendencies. Curriculum will no longer stand isolated, but move into a socially relevant flexible modality. In order to analyze and systematize the managerial organization of the unique needs of the transcescent, there must be a reciprocal relationship established and correlated with administration and staff. In order to develop and implement this relationship, extensive, synchronized staff development will be implemented. This program will overcome the antichronistic [sic] situation that existed in the program before. . . . Everyone is excited and cannot wait until Fall. . . . Public cooperation is solicited in reducing the current high number of telephone calls to the superintendent.

This example was written by a group of graduate students instructed to do as poor a job as possible in preparing a press release. They did well. But haven't educators sometimes approached this level of idiocy in communicating purposes and procedures? It seems almost built in. Groups in the same graduate classes, instructed to write as effectively as possible on the same subject, have difficulty breaking out of the jargon that has left the public not only baffled, but suspicious.

A Sound Public Relations Program

If the special needs, characteristics, and developmental tasks of youngsters in the middle years require special curriculum, instructional, and institutional procedures that are strange ideas to many people in the community, then communicating what we do and why we do it is difficult.

First, we need help. School systems should have a well-planned, adequately supported public relations program guided by people with professional expertise in this field. The program's purpose is not to lie to the public, or to cover up. The purpose is to explain and to communicate honestly and responsibly the achievements of the schools, their needs, and, when necessary, their problems. In addition to an overall district program, each school should have its own communication program.

Such a program should help in four ways:

1. *To sense and analyze public concerns and opinions about the schools.* This can be done through public opinion surveys and key communicator networks.[3] You discover what the public wants to know and what it is misunderstanding.

2. *To select and formulate messages that will meet public needs and desires for information.* Select messages that fill gaps in public understanding or try to correct misunderstandings and misinformation. Relate these messages effectively so they meet the public's needs.

3. *To find, select, and use the channels of communication that will most effectively deliver the messages to the community as a whole and to various publics within it*—e.g., parents, community and neighborhood leaders, retired teachers, the business community, churches, civic organizations, the elderly, and others who do not have students in the public schools.

A sound public relations program recognizes:

- That effective media relations are essential
- That special publications and presentations—e.g., district newsletters, school newsletters, talks to groups, slide-tape presentations, American Education Week displays—can be very helpful
- That informal communication on a person-to-person or person-to-group basis and the involvement of all citizens in schools and their activities are powerful forms of communication.[4]

4. *To evaluate the results of communication and activities in relation to the goals set forth in the public relations plans of the district and of the individual schools.* Public relations planning, like other institutional planning, should be a

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continuous process. Study, plan, act, evaluate, replan, and act again.

Plan of Action

These are rather abstract ideas. What can a middle-level principal actually do?

- By planning and by staff development, the principal can see that the faculty, staff, and administrators work together on what they are doing, that they all know what they want to do and why they want to do it. For example, flexibility in scheduling is especially suited to the learning needs of middle level students. Every staff member should understand the reasons why.

Planning and staff development are essential to the success of the educational program. If there is dissension, confusion, or ambiguity among the staff concerning purposes, procedures, and reasons for them, this will be communicated to others outside the school. The school will then lose credibility.[5]

- The principal can develop, with the staff, superintendent, and school system's public relations professional, a year's communication and involvement plan for the school.[6] With their help—and with the help of an advisory committee—he or she can plan, implement, and evaluate a manageable number of activities. Such a plan would help the principal of the middle school I visited explain clearly and simply that mini-courses are designed to meet the diversified interests and curiosity of young people.

- Offering public relations inservice training for the teachers, secretaries, aides, and all support staff to teach them about the nature and needs of the students and the goals, plans, and arrangements to meet these needs; to make each one feel valued as an essential part of the team; to provide advice and guidance for dealing with the public; and to improve personal communication behavior is important.

For example, all members of the school team should understand that many adolescents are caught up in a struggle to understand and make peace with authority and that they will often vacillate between defying authority and seeking the security it offers. If educators and support staff understand such needs and how we seek to deal with them, they are less likely to be put on the defensive by critical remarks.

- The principal should stay informed about research and developments affecting education so he or she will know what to say when the reporter calls for a comment about a controversial event involving the school. Public relations experts can help administrators prepare for dealing effectively with uncomfortable and important circumstances, and for developing good, on-going relationships with representatives of the media.

Another area for careful scrutiny is the school's publications, such as news releases, the school newsletter, parents' handbooks, and letters to parents. Will the recipients, who are not experts in child development and education, understand what is intended?

The principal should also seek advice about being diplomatic, firm, and assertive. He or she should never allow himself or herself to be put on the defensive when explaining the programs unique to meeting adolescent needs. He or she should learn to explain them clearly, not run for cover when someone objects.

Also remember that while parents may sometimes be frustrated with youngsters this age, they also know a great deal about them. Administrators and parents can work together, sharing their knowledge about adolescents.[7]

> The program's purpose is not to lie to the public, or to cover up. The purpose is to explain and to communicate honestly and responsibly the achievements of their schools, their needs, and, when necessary, their problems.

Listen and try to communicate as clearly as possible that middle level educators support, motivate, and achieve *learning*. Always remember that the principal's own behavior and attitudes critically affect communication in the school and between it and its public.

Endnotes

1. "Communicating about the Critical Years: The Need for Public Relations Programs for Middle Schools," *Middle School Journal*, May 1985, Vol. XVI, no. 3, pp. 19-21, 30.
2. "The Little Girl and the Wolf," *James Thurber's Fables for Our Time*. Garden City, N.Y.: Blue Ribbon Books, 1943, p. 5.
3. See "Key Communicators," prepared by Don Bagin, professor and communications coordinator of the M.A. program in school public relations, Glassboro State College, Glassboro, N.J.
4. The writer has previously suggested a variety of such activities and given a list of short, practical references. See article referenced above.

5. A graduate student, analyzing his school system, reports on internal conflicts affecting rust and morale within the system and concludes: "You can put all sorts of rumor help systems out in the community, but if you are not making an effort within, the feeding systems develop everywhere, and growth of the creature is rapid and destructive."
6. If the school system does not yet employ someone to provide professional assistance in public relations planning and activities, seek help from local media representatives, printers, parents, or other volunteers. Even small communities usually have a wealth of resources available and willing to help schools.
7. For this seminal idea about human communication, I am indebted to my colleague, Carvin L. Brown.

FEBRUARY 1989

School Restructuring: A Leadership Challenge for Middle Level Administrators

By Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark

Parents and community members across the nation are pressuring school boards, administrators, and teachers to improve the quality of educational programs, saying that the first wave of changes brought about by school improvement reforms must now be replaced by more significant change.

School improvement plans that set out to raise standards, increase accountability, improve student achievement test scores, and increase teacher pay were a good start but are not enough. Michael Cohen, associate director of education programs for the National Governors' Association, suggests that "school improvement plans do a very good job of beginning to change the culture of school" by creating a sense of shared responsibility. However, he says, "they rarely get to fundamental curriculum, instruction, or other structural issues" (*ASCD Update*, 1988).

Middle Level School Improvement and School Restructuring

Middle level administrators, like administrators at other levels, have been involved in school improvement programs; in some cases they have also been involved in school restructuring as they attempt to make their schools more developmentally responsive to the needs of early adolescents.

Sally N. Clark and Donald C. Clark are professors of education at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

What is restructuring? According to Ken Michaels (1988) it is the second wave of school reform that brings with it "an exciting and markedly different agenda." Included in this agenda, says Michaels, are the following components:

1. The individual school as the unit of decision making
2. Development of collegial, participatory environment among both students and staff members
3. Flexible use of time
4. Increased personalization of the school environment with a concurrent atmosphere of trust, high expectancies, and sense of fairness
5. A curriculum that focuses on students' understanding what they learn—knowing "why" as well as "how"
6. An emphasis on higher-order thinking skills for all students.

Cohen (*ASCD Update*, 1988), of the National Governors' Association and one of the leading advocates of school restructuring, believes that in restructuring:

> Educators should not look for a blueprint for change with specified elements. What we need to strive for is creating multiple blueprints . . . you want to say "here are a range of ways in which we can conceivably provide instruction." The purpose is to give a wider range of alternatives.

We believe, after closely examining the changes taking place in middle level school programs, that middle level educators are on the forefront of the school restructuring movement.

The kinds of changes that Cohen, Michaels, and others are calling for have been recognized by proponents of middle level education for a number of years. More particularly, middle level educators have been making changes that go far beyond the current school improvement plans and the focus of that change has been on programs that bring about significant differences in ways in which the school is structured, teachers work, content is organized, and students learn.

With programs such as interdisciplinary teaming, flexible scheduling, adviser/advisee programs, and a variety of new instructional approaches, it is evident that major restructuring is taking place in middle level schools. This restructuring, however, is making major leadership demands on administrators. In addressing these demands we will examine three areas of leadership: characteristics, knowledge, and skills.

Middle Level School Leadership: Characteristics

School restructuring requires a new look at leadership. Middle level administrators must be visionary, they must change current mind sets, and they must let go of old ways of doing things. They must not only be able to lead but they must encourage and allow leadership to emerge from others. Schlechty (1988) says:

> What schools need is more leadership, not simply stronger leaders. It is time to recognize that instructional leadership inherently resides in the role of the teacher. Inherent in the role of the principal must be the expectation that one will lead leaders.

The leadership challenge is how to get extraordinary things done through ordinary people. Drucker (1985) believes that effective leaders possess the hard-won ability to get the right things done at the right time. They (leaders) build on strengths (theirs and others who work for them), focus on positive opportunities, and view problems as challenges.

We have identified the following characteristics as being important for leaders who wish to bring about successful middle level school restructuring:

1. A passion for middle level education
2. Willingness to share decision making
3. Concern for the well-being of all persons in the school
4. Opportunity orientation
5. A good self-concept
6. Model of school norms.

The effective middle level administrator has a *passion for middle level schools*. He or she is motivated and excited about the possibilities of creating more responsive programs. Bennis (1987) says:

> . . . every leader has a passion for the promises of life . . . . If the basic ingredient for leadership is the passion for the promises of life, the key to realizing those promises is the deployment of self.

For the successful middle level principal, that "passion for the promises of life" includes a burning desire to do everything humanly possible to make his or her school developmentally responsive to the needs of the early adolescent. Fulfilling this desire means developing one's skills and knowledge in every way possible.

Shared decision making is a major component of restructuring. Administrators must be willing to involve teachers in making major decisions about the direction(s) the restructuring will take. An able leader actively involves staff members in leadership. Peters and Austin (1985b) say: "Leadership is the liberation of talent. What people need from work is to be liberated, to be involved, to be accountable, and to reach for their potential."

The concept of teacher empowerment, which is inherent in shared decision making, should not be viewed as the relinquishing of administrator authority. Robert St. Clair, former president of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, feels that enhancing the professional status of teachers enhances the professional status of principals as well. He states: "It would be an error to conclude that the only way to empower teachers is to take power from the principalship" (St. Clair, 1988).

Middle level administrators must be visionary, they must change current mind sets, and they must let go of old ways of doing things.

Shared decision making is a powerful technique for securing teacher involvement and commitment to the restructuring process. It is important to remember that a crucial factor in empowerment is knowledge and information. Teachers and administrators who are uninformed about the important issues in middle level education should not participate in the decision-making process, nor should they participate in the cooperative governance of a school.

Effective middle level administrators *care about all people in their schools*. They care about teachers, support staff, students, and parents. A climate of caring, support, and nurturing is created, and as a result, everyone feels important and involved. This is a climate in which restructuring can take place.

> There are a lot of brilliant people in the world who are, and will remain ineffective leaders. Why? Because they are so interested in themselves and their own accomplishments that they never get around to appreciating and understanding the feelings of the other people who are sharing the world with them (*Bits and Pieces*, 1987).

Looking for opportunities is another important characteristic of a good leader. There is a willingness to accept challenges and to try new approaches. Peters and Austin (1985a) suggest that many organizations make it the norm *not* to be trying new things, but they believe that we need to "reverse the normal"—the workplace must become a full-fledged laboratory for learning and perpetual improvement.

We must not only learn to live through the change process, but have something productive come from it. Middle level school leaders who consider their schools to be "laboratories for learning and perpetual improvement" are successfully restructuring schools. Their leadership is not risk-focused but opportunity-oriented.

A good self-concept is crucial for effective leadership. Johnston, Markle, and Forrer (1984) suggest that in effective principals there is a high congruence between the principal's perception of himself or herself and the view of the school and the community. Principals who are knowledgeable and confident about their ability are more likely to consult with staff members and share decision making with teachers, parents, and community members.

In addition to needing good self-concept, *leaders must serve as examples of expected behaviors*. Bennis states (1987): "As many leaders have learned, mere position and authority are not enough . . . a leader doesn't just get the message across. A leader is the message!"

Leaders must be leaders in establishing appropriate "norms" for their schools. To do this leaders must have a clear sense of school mission and a clear picture of school goals (academic, social, emotional, and physical). The effective school leader must constantly be in the forefront of modeling cooperative working relationships and encouraging participation from a wide variety of persons in the decision-making process.

Middle Level School Leadership: Knowledge Bases

In providing good leadership, a middle level administrator must have a foundation of knowledge on which to base the decision-making process. Knowledge of the following are essential for success:

1. Early adolescent characteristics and behavior
2. Successful middle level programs
3. School strengths and weaknesses
4. Parent and community expectations
5. Change process.

One of the unique features of the middle level school should be that it provides programs that are developmentally responsive to the needs of early adolescents. This can only be done if educators in the school have a good knowledge and understanding of this particular group. Middle level leaders as well as all those involved in decision making must *be informed about the general characteristics of early adolescents and the specific needs and characteristics of the students in their schools.*

> **The concept of teacher empowerment, which is inherent in shared decision making, should not be viewed as the relinquishing of administrator authority.**

Thornburg's seven developmental characteristics of early adolescents include (1980):

1. Becoming aware of increased physical changes
2. Organizing knowledge and concepts into problem-solving strategies
3. Learning new social/sex roles
4. Recognizing one's identification with stereotype
5. Developing friendships with others
6. Gaining a sense of independence
7. Developing a sense of morality and values.

Knowledge of the specific needs of the students enrolled in the school is also essential for program restructuring. Achievement test scores, grades, self-concept measures, and sociological information typically found in cumulative folders are important pieces of information necessary in the decision-making process.

Middle level program restructuring also requires a *knowledge of successful middle level practices*. Lipsitz (1984) identifies what she believes to be seven essential characteristics of successful middle level schools:

1. Competence and achievement
2. Self-exploration and definition
3. Social interaction with peers and adults
4. Physical activity
5. Meaningful participation in school and community
6. Routine, limits, and structure
7. Diversity.

In her book *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (1984) she states:

> . . . schools responsive to early adolescent development will: reduce the size of the focus groups, personalize the quality of adult/student relationships, give ample room for peer groups to flourish, acknowledge diverse areas of competence, involve students in participatory activities, emphasize self-exploration and physical activity, and encompass all of these in a clearly defined, structured environment.

Middle level educators such as Gatewood (1973) indicate that one of the major goals of middle level schools should be the development of "an instructional system focused on individual progress, with many curricular options and with individualized instruction in appropriate areas."

Other educators, while emphasizing that the focus of the curriculum must be on the learner rather than the structure, advocate programs that feature flexibility of time and group size, individualized/personalized instruction, a variety of learning experiences, alternative evaluation procedures, and new roles for teachers and administrators.

We must not only learn to live through the change process, but have something productive come from it.

Clark and Valentine (1981), using information from several studies, suggest that successful middle level programs can be divided into three major areas: environmental (organizational structure); content (scope and sequence); and strategies (process, methods, and materials of instruction). Under *Program Environments* the following components are listed:

- Schedule that includes provision for both interdisciplinary blocks and single subject courses
- Cocurricular activities scheduled as part of the regular school day
- Opportunity for all students to participate in intramural and, when appropriate, interscholastic programs
- Provision for community involvement in the educational program. This includes bringing community members into the school and involving students in the community
- Opportunities to learn through interdisciplinary teams where students can interact with a variety of teachers in a wide range of subject areas.

Included in the area of *Program Content* are the following items:

- Emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills
- Availability of required exploratory courses
- Opportunity to participate in elective classes
- Provision for both remediation and enrichment
- Required reading instruction
- Provision for daily physical instruction
- Opportunity for instruction in both health and sex education.

For the final category of *Program Strategies* the following items are included:

- Availability of multi-media (print and non-print) resources
- Provision for a variety of teacher-student teaching and student learning styles
- Provision for flexible learning group size
- Adaptation of the curriculum to concrete/formal cognitive learning needs of students
- Availability of teacher-adviser program
- Provision for individualized grade reporting based on each student's ability and including parent conferences
- Opportunities for each student to explore and clarify values
- Provision for individualized/personalized programs that include diagnosis, prescription, and evaluation.
- Organization of content into a continuous progress sequence that allows students to progress at their individual rates.

These three major program areas, while not all-inclusive, when combined with the research of Lipsitz and others, form the skeletal knowledge base needed by all administrators and teachers as they begin the restructuring process.

Middle level administrators must have a *clear picture of school strengths and weaknesses*. This clear picture is gained through systematic assessment of teachers, staff members, students, parents, and community members. While there are several ways of gathering this data, one method is the structured interview that consists of a series of questions asked of various reference groups in the school (i.e., parents/community members, teachers, staff members, and students). With information from these groups, program planning can build on school strengths and develop procedures for correcting the acknowledged weaknesses.

Knowledge of *parent and community expectations of the school* is vital in restructuring the middle level school. Too often administrators assume they know what parents and community members want from their middle level school. With all the emphasis on "back-to-basics" and standardized testing, it is easy to believe that all the American public wants is a narrow content-based cur-

riculum. This assumption is erroneous according to the studies by Goodlad and Garvin.

In *A Place Called School*, John Goodlad (1984) found that parents of middle level students rated the broad goals of education (academic, vocational, social and civic, and personal) as very important. In his conclusions about parental expectations, Goodlad stated:

> . . . I do not know of serious studies that come up with a narrow list of parental expectations of schools. When it comes to education, it appears that most parents want their children to have it all. I believe, then, that many policy makers have to be misinterpreting parents' expectations for schools and then overreacting to this misinterpretation.

James Garvin (1987) interviewed more than 1,000 parents of students in middle level schools to ascertain their expectations. When these parents were asked, "What would you like for the middle level school to provide for your child?" they answered as follows (in order of priority):

1. When my child goes to school, more than anything else I want to know that he/she is safe.
2. I want to know that when my child is in school that he/she knows at least one adult well enough to go to if support is needed.
3. I want to know that the school is concerned about helping my youngster develop constructive friends.
4. I expect that school will provide my youngster with opportunities to be involved in activities.
5. When my youngster comes home from school, I want to know that he/she has had enough good experiences to want to return the next day.
6. While my child is in school over these years, I want to know that the school is teaching what he/she will need to know to be prepared for high school.
7. While my youngster is in school, I want teachers to keep me informed on his/her progress.
8. When I visit the school, I want to feel welcomed by teachers and administrators.
9. I'd like to know that the school is making every effort to provide opportunities for parents to be informed about what to expect from youngsters over these years.

Goodlad and Garvin have clearly shown that parents expect the goals of middle level schools to include much more than academics.

If middle level schools are to focus on local needs and the uniqueness of the community, then administrators must ascertain the expectations of parents and community members as a part of their restructuring efforts. The success of any middle level school is determined by the extent to which it is supported and valued by the community and by the parents of the students who attend.

The understanding of the *change process* is another important knowledge base for administrators. Leaders must be aware of the dynamics of change in their efforts to create more responsive schools.

Ronald Havelock defines change as "any significant alteration to the status quo intended to benefit the people involved" (Wells, 1987). Middle level restructuring is based on the notion of change that intends "to benefit the people involved": students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

In bringing about change it is important to know what motivates people to change. The degree to which teachers are motivated to participate in the change process is influenced by the degree that they perceive change as:

1. Being more effective than what they are currently doing
2. Compatible with their own value system
3. Not too complex to implement
4. Triable on a small scale with low visibility
5. Offering high visibility and recognition if successful.

While extensive knowledge and competence in the change process is helpful, it must be recognized that changing a middle level school is hard work. Drucker (1986) believes that innovation makes great demands on diligence, persistence, and commitment; and if these are lacking, no amount of talent, ingenuity, or knowledge will avail.

Middle Level School Leadership: Skills

In identifying leadership skills for middle level administrators one can draw heavily on the work of Thomas Sergiovanni, who describes five leadership forces that we have modified slightly (1984). Sergiovanni's terms are shown in parentheses.

1. School management (Technical)
2. Human relations and communication (Human)
3. Curriculum and instructional management and improvement (Educational)
4. Modeling and "purposing" (Symbolic)
5. Creating school cultures (Cultural)

The leader skilled in *school management* (technical) assumes the role of a management engineer. He/she emphasizes such concepts as planning, time management, contingency leadership, and organizational structure. This leader provides for planning, organizing, and coordinating the activities of the school. A competent school manager is skilled at manipulating the strategies and situations to ensure optimum effectiveness.

Skilled *human relations and communication* (human) leaders provide support, encouragement, and growth opportunities for faculty and staff members by emphasizing such concepts as human relations, interpersonal competence, and instrumental motivational technologies. These skilled leaders are adept at building and maintaining morale and using such processes as participatory decision making.

Curriculum and instructional management and improvement (educational) leaders assume the role of clinical practitioners. At the middle level they bring expert professional knowledge to the process of effective teaching, educational program development, and supervision.

These leaders are particularly strong in their knowledge of early adolescent learners and appropriate educational programming and they use this background in combination with their skills in diagnosing educational problems; providing for supervision, evaluation, and staff development; and developing curriculum. Many, including John Goodlad (1984), feel that this area of leadership is neglected or largely ignored. Many middle level administrators feel ill at ease with curriculum and instructional issues and this uneasiness may lie partly in the lack of comprehensive preparation for curriculum and instructional leadership in most administrative certification programs.

Knowledge of the specific needs of the students enrolled in the school is also essential for program restructuring.

Sergiovanni believes that when these first three forces or skills are brought together "in an effort to maintain and improve schooling, . . . they provide the critical mass needed for competent schooling" (1984).

When there is a deficit in any one of these three areas, it upsets the "critical mass" and less effective schools are the result. These three factors are not enough, however, to provide for excellent schools. "Excellent organizations, schools among them, are characterized by other leadership qualities; symbolic and cultural" (Sergiovanni, 1984).

The leader who demonstrates *modeling and purposing* (symbolic) skills signals to others what is important and of value by modeling important roles and behaviors. He or she visits classrooms, seeks out and visibly spends time with students, downplays management concerns in favor of educational ones, and provides a unified vision of the school through proper use of words and examples. This is why the successful middle level school administrator shares decision making, participates in school activities, and attends staff development sessions.

Warren Bennis (1987) argues that a compelling vision is the key ingredient of leadership in the excellent organizations he studies. Vision, according to Bennis, refers to the capacity to create and communicate a view of the desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working in the organization.

Vision, then, becomes the substance of what is communicated as symbolic aspects of leadership are emphasized. Middle level leaders must have a vision of the responsive middle level school and be able to communicate that vision to teachers, students, parents, and community members.

The ability to *create school cultures* (cultural) is another important leadership skill. Cultural leadership requires that the leader seek "to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity" (Sergiovanni, 1984). Cultural leadership leads to the bonding of students and teachers into a cadre of believers in the work of the school. Sergiovanni believes:

> As persons become members of this strong and binding culture, they are provided with opportunities for enjoying a special sense of personal importance and significance. Their work and their lives take on a new importance, one characterized by an expanded sense of identity and a feeling of belonging to something special.

This, of course, is the type of climate or culture that must be created if significant middle level school restructuring is going to take place.

Successful Middle Level Restructuring: Some Suggestions

The following suggestions, when followed, will help facilitate the restructuring process.

1. Know your community. Principals need to know what the parents, community, and school board members expect from their schools. Don't make assumptions, because many times what appears to be community and parental opinion only represents a small minority. Involve all segments of the community in the restructuring process, including assessment, investigation of alternatives, decision making, and program planning.

2. Know your faculty and staff. Effective principals know the organization of the informal leadership in their schools. They know the workers, the leaders, the blockers, the innovators, and the followers. They know how to get these various factions organized and involved and they know the importance of participation in decision making and staff development.

3. Know about early adolescents in general and the spe-

cific needs of those enrolled in your school. Middle level schools should exist to be developmentally responsive to early adolescent needs. Knowledge about their social, intellectual, emotional, and physical needs will serve as the basis for developing successful schools.

4. Know and defend the uniqueness of the middle level school. The most critical challenge facing middle level administrators in the restructuring process is protecting the "middle level concept." In spite of increasing popularity, middle level schools are on the endangered list. They are endangered by commission reports such as *A Nation at Risk,* which are promoting more rigorous academic programs while reducing activity programs.

At the elementary level, effective schools research that narrows the definition of effectiveness to achievement on standardized tests limit the variety and flexibility needed for the middle level curriculum. While successful middle level schools do emphasize the importance of academic achievement, it is not considered the sole mission of the school. Programs that emphasize academics only are inappropriate to the needs of early adolescents.

Middle level school administrators must assist school board and community members in understanding the middle level concept. Middle level administrators must resist all attempts to implement recommendations from major commission reports without first conducting a rigorous study of the appropriateness of the recommendations for middle level schools.

5. Know about successful middle level school programs. The literature is full of success stories about middle level programs. Know what works and why. Read, attend conferences, view media, and visit schools. Do everything you possibly can to learn about all the aspects of middle level programming. This kind of knowledge is imperative for successful instructional leadership.

6. Know that each middle level school is different. Each school has its own strengths and weaknesses its own group of students with special needs, and special set of parent and community expectations. Each school is *unique* and for that reason no program from one school may be imposed on another school and be expected to be successful.

Successful middle level schools are developed by administrators, teachers, parents, and community members involved in cooperative decision making and determining what is best for their students.

7. Know about the process of change and how to involve others. Knowing about the dynamics of change is vital in the restructuring process. Involvement is one of the keys to making change acceptable.

8. Plan! Plan! Plan! Successful restructuring calls for a comprehensive long-range plan. This plan, which is based upon the school's mission statement, is an orderly sequence of tasks that must be completed for the school to accomplish its goals. It is developed by administrators, teachers, parents, and community members, and provides for the pacing of change, the identification of involvement, and the allocation of resources. Most comprehensive middle level restructuring plans are built around a three to five year span.

9. Be an example! The principal sets the example for the school. He or she is constantly being viewed by the faculty, staff, and students. Modeling behavior is crucial in keeping the focus on the school's priorities.

10. Work hard; diligence pays off. There is no substitute for hard work and perseverance. Principals must keep focused on the school's mission for improvement while at the same time managing the day-to-day affairs of the school. Successful middle level principals do this by hard work, time management, effective climate building, and high visibility.

Administrators of successful middle level schools are continuously engaged in school restructuring. They have a vision of what a responsive middle level school should be, a vision based upon a solid knowledge base. Because of this vision and the characteristics, knowledge, and skills they possess, they are able to convey their vision and involve others in the school restructuring process. Successful middle level schools do not just happen—they are a result of intelligent leadership and effort.

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